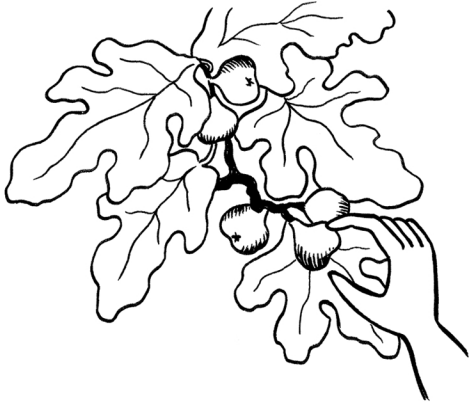


On Permission

How do we know we are ready to write about a particular experience?



Notes from a 7th Wave Residency
Session Discussion, June '24
-Issy Manley

At this time of year, I pick fruit from the fig trees that grow on sidewalks (or over fences) as I walk around my neighborhood. Do I strictly have permission? No...Does that make me a fruit thief? Well, if the tree is on the street (a public space) - with so much unpicked fruit that it's rotting on the sidewalk - I consider a pocket-full of figs fair game.



Here are some thoughts on intuiting another kind of permission - surfacing a sense of permission to make creative work about our own experiences.

1. A sense of permission can come from your readers...

You (or at least I!) don't necessarily feel completely confident exploring a specific experience or topic before beginning to write about it.

When I've published comics about the frustratingly absurd process of applying to jobs, or the psychological detriment of working on an extremely rigid timetable- topics that don't initially feel that taboo -I've been surprised to get passionate responses from many readers who feel similarly.



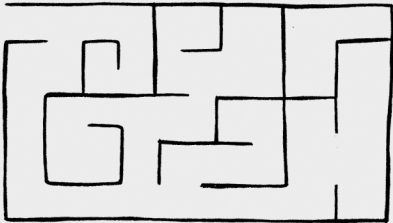
The comic I made about my experience gives someone else permission to voice their own truth - that they too find job interviews arbitrary and humiliating, or that following a minute by minute schedule at their job also makes them feel deeply anxious.



These responses - from strangers- grant me a kind of retroactive, reciprocal permission because I see that what I wrote did resonate with someone else. Sharing creative work becomes a space where the maker and the reader both feel seen - and isn't that why we write in the first place?

2. Autobiographical doesn't have to mean personal...

In some autobio comics, I see my character as an avatar for anyone navigating opaque, unfeeling bureaucracies (like for-profit healthcare or the unemployment benefits office).



I don't feel vulnerable or shameful writing about things like my sexual health or losing a job as I'm focused on exploring the *universal* disfunction of systems meant to support us (rather than my interior life).

3. Permission in craft/form...

There's a reason we gravitate toward making work in a particular medium, rather than just telling a friend about something that happened. In comics, the juxtaposition of words with images leaves lots of opportunity for layering or contrasting meaning- and the act of drawing can be engaging or rewarding in itself.



Can the form or language in a poem - or the framing structure in an essay - hold space or grant permission to write about an challenging experience? (Or at least make the process more pleasurable?)

4. Permission as refusal

I believe that expression and creativity are intrinsic human needs - that's why I'm an art teacher (and a socialist)! Yet *my* day job - and most jobs in the present moment - demand more and more of our time and suck up most of our energy. But I don't want to *only* do my job!



Giving myself permission to write or draw a comic feels like refusing to allow my job (or capitalism in general) to completely control and exhaust my creativity and imagination.

Sometimes I don't feel qualified or skilled enough to make a comic about a complex, multifaceted subject - like climate crisis research. Yet I also believe ordinary, non-expert people (like me!) have a right to examine the conditions in which we live. I remember that *I* want to consume creative work by other working people - and not just the few professional artists or writers. Returning to my beliefs about expression and creativity for *all* people helps me locate my own personal sense of permission to make comics.



Thank you for sharing and inviting me to share my thoughts!