



THE SONG OF STILLNESS: MUSINGS ON CREATIVITY & CST

MARI JOYCE

As I sit and write, I hear the steady stream of cars from the open window, while outside a river flows on silently. A song is trying to make sense of itself in the back of my mind, not yet fully written, and slowly, I invite myself to settle and connect to a deeper stillness.

Returning to memories of my first contact with CST, I remember how moved I felt by the depth of stillness that my system contacted. How intricately my process seemed to unfurl from that place, and how gently I felt myself witnessed and held in the presence of the practitioner. At the time I had recently finished my art degree, working with music, photography, film and performance, examining the body as the site of experience. My first CST session felt like a mirroring of my creative explorations. Though I did not have the words to describe my experience at the time, I sensed the work's capacity to guide into depths of contact both within and without, a theme which continues to lie at the heart of my practice to this day.

The Heart of the Unfolding Process

Coming to CST with a background as an artist and musician, I experience many crossovers, and ultimately find them both to be a supportive exploration of what it is to be fully human. Within my creative work I attend to the unfolding of a living process, and will often begin an enquiry from stillness, silence and listening. This has helped to inform my CST practice, deepening my appreciation of the value of staying present to what arises. Equally, my engagement with CST speaks mountains to my creative practice and encourages me to work with presence, heart and patience. In both realms of enquiry, I draw on resources, witness the arising of the body's stories, the patterns that ripple outward, and orient to a sense of wholeness and integration of the bodymind.

In a recent interview, KATHERINE UKLEJA (Sep 2015) spoke of how the approach used in CST is akin to that of an artist or poet, whereby we engage through our visceral perceptions and orientate to interconnection and wholeness. She went on to describe how stillness lies at the heart of unfolding process: "Stillness

can deepen and expand like the depth of an ocean. Together with our client we deepen and expand into stillness... In that there is the experience of a loss of differentiation and the sense of a huge connection. Being one with the universe, what went before, what is now and what is yet to come."

Cultivating the Compassionate Witness

My early experiences of CST began as a small stream and continue now to grow into a river of exploration, coursing through the relational nature of healing, creative processes and the spiritual. I now find myself in my final year of training in BCST with Franklyn Sills and Cherionna Menzam-Sills at The Karuna Institute, and I am struck that within both creative and therapeutic practice, our greatest challenges and our greatest gifts can lie in our relationship with stillness and staying present to what arises. Cultivating the skill of compassionate witnessing feels vital to working with any depth of material, whether in the role of therapist or artist. We make space, we take a step back with our ego mind and we welcome what arises, gently following the impulses that guide and unfurl our process.

Here I would like to refer to the discipline of Authentic Movement (AM) to elucidate the role of witnessing.

CHERYL HALEY

Originally created as 'Movement in Depth' by Mary Starks Whitehouse in the 1950s, AM is a contemplative movement practice in the field of Dance Movement Therapy, further developed by Janet Adler, Joan Chodorow and Linda Hartley. Working in dyad forms and in groups, embodied awareness is cultivated in the roles of mover and witness through an exploration of free, spontaneous, 'authentic' movement. Speaking of the importance of the role of the witness, Adler writes: "The witness practices the art of seeing. Seeing clearly is not about knowing what the mover needs or must do. The witness does not 'look at' the mover, but instead, as she internalises the mover, she attends to her own experience... As she acknowledges ownership of her experiences, the density of her personal history empties, enabling the witness at times to feel that she can see the mover clearly, and more importantly, that

she can see herself clearly. Sometimes ... it is grace ... the witness embodies a clear presence." ('Authentic Movement: Essays by MARY STARKS WHITEHOUSE, JANET ADLER and JOAN CHODOROW', 1999)

The Ground of Creative Arising

Whitehouse describes that when we are held by a compassionate witness, whether our own or that of another, we are able to drop into a depth of contact with ourselves, in which we wait and allow ourselves to be moved by an impulse: "[T]he open waiting, which is also a kind of listening to the body, an emptiness in which something can happen. You wait until you feel a change – the body sinks or begins to tip, the head slowly lowers or rolls to one side. As you feel it begin, you follow where it leads, like following a pathway that opens up before you as you step." This process feels to me to be the ground of creative arising, that all artists and therapists are subtly following.

Within my practice as a musician, I have a relationship with stillness and silence as a ground from which creative intention arises spontaneously, through improvisation. Working from a place of listening and curiosity, melodies and words reveal themselves in textures and forms that are somehow not my conscious choosing, but come through me. I feel that CST holds something of this in its approach, seeing all of life as expressions of the greater creative force, the breath of life. Our unfolding is, to the breath of life, as music is to us. HUGH MILNE iterates this analogy beautifully in his text, 'The Heart of Listening' (1995): "Expect nothing; want nothing. Just be – be here now. In that space of being, in silence and stillness, a sweet space opens up somewhere within you, an inner music begins."

Stillness as Resource

In this way stillness can be experienced as a vital inherent resource. When we are able to drop into stillness, we return to a familiar sense of feeling held by the universe. Our receptivity to this relational holding field can be traced back in part to our early experiences of a loving, nurturing environment of family, friends and community, but also to experiences of being in nature. Early on in my CST training, when asked to find a resource, I was reminded of a time living in a community in the mountains of southern Spain, sleeping outside, cradled by mountain bodies and serenaded by

cicadas. In the heart of nature, I am held by the Universe. There are times, of course, when we struggle to move out of states of suffering and to reorient to what supports and resources us. I have found for many of my practice clients, the very notion of resource has felt alien. So how can we help ourselves and others to reconnect to an embodied sense of resource and safety, when stress and trauma are so active within us?

Healing in the Depths of Stillness

Inevitably we can only begin with where we are in this moment. Within stillness lies the potential for a depth of contact with ourselves in which we might witness what is present in this moment. Supported by the therapeutic presence of a practitioner skilled in holding a nurturing and safe space, we can start to come into greater contact with our unfolding process. In 'Being and Becoming' (2009), FRANKLYN SILLS describes the healing that emerges from stillness: "The ability to be with self as arising process, rather than as a fixed form, represents a critical shift in the client's therapeutic work. It opens the door to their experiencing the being that underlies selfhood and so to healing their deepest wounding... This kind of healing can only take place in the present moment, in the stillness that lies at the heart of their suffering. I have observed over and over again that the deepest changes in a client's process occur in this dynamic stillness."

Within stillness we have the opportunity to come into contact with deeper levels of our being. We might experience ourselves and the Universe to be essentially loving in nature. Or we might find great discomfort within stillness and simply be with our wounds and the perceived suffering around us. How can we be with our hurting? How can we be with another and their hurting? It is through staying present and curious in these depths that 'something' emerges. Stillness feels like the landscape that we journey through, in the light and the dark. Our tools are openness, curiosity and gentleness, and if we travel well, we might return with gifts of wisdom from the body. 🌱

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