

Witnessing and the Chest of Drawers¹

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Mary Starks Whitehouse (1979) considered her movement work as having its foundation in Carl Jung's theory of the individuation process, which she described as "the slow unfolding of a wholeness already there" (p.78). Many have built upon Whitehouse's pioneering approach to integrating the body in movement with Jung's theory of individuation and his practice of active imagination. In this way of working, previously unconscious images and aspects of our wholeness become embodied and lived more fully (Chodorow, 1978, 1990, 1991; Wyman-McGinty, 1998).

I was first introduced to Mary Starks Whitehouse's work in 1969 by Dr. Ed Maupin, a psychologist who was working with her at that time. He described it as "your own yoga" (Maupin, 1969). In 1989, Mary Ramsay, Daphne Lowell, and I co-founded *Contemplative Dance*, an open-ended, multidimensional process which has since evolved to meet our needs and those of its participants. In *Contemplative Dance* workshops and trainings we explore this process as a spiritual practice, an unfolding of our psychological narratives, and a creative resource.

We move while invoking an inner witness to our experience. When we serve as outer witnesses for someone else moving, we also invoke an inner witness to our own experience. Like moving, witnessing stirs the imagination. Both moving and witnessing are forms of active imagination (Chodorow, 1990). The stages are as follows:

1. unconscious material is invoked
2. it is given form and embodied
3. the ego dialogues with the unconscious material
4. the material, as now understood, can then be applied to the situation at hand or to ongoing relationships and issues (Chodorow, 1978).

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Using active imagination through moving and witnessing enriches our awareness and aids us in the discovery of significant insights.

Our experience as witnesses is shaped by our projections—the images, stories, memories, and associations evoked by what we see and feel. Projections are a way of letting the imagination unfold, play out, stretch, and extend itself. We often think of projections as negative or limiting, and therefore to be avoided. On the contrary, active imagination encourages their exploration. As witnesses it is not our goal to be either objective or neutral. Rather, we serve the mover better if we become more aware of our own ways of perceiving and are able to acknowledge our projections. The meeting between our story and our partner's story is filled with a subjectivity that embodies truth, often obscured by objectivity. The unique associations and projections of each witness, when offered to the mover with care, can be an indication that the witness has been present to the mover, has been affected by his or her movements, and has truly seen them. To know precisely what the mover may be feeling or thinking, to "get it right," is not the purpose of this practice. If a witness's experience coincides with a mover's, it is tempting for both to assume that the witness knows what is happening for the mover. Synchronous experience can certainly be shared, but the witness must own it as a projection lest mover or witness presume the witness has special powers. Being aware of projections does not preclude trusting our intuition. However, it does remind us to check with the movers rather than presuming to know what their experiences are.

During two decades as training and workshop leader, I have explored various ways to think about our projections and perceptions as we witness another person moving. I often offer the homey, accessible image of a chest of drawers as a way to imagine our modes of perceiving. Each drawer represents a different mode, quality, or response. The tactile, kinesthetic image of a chest of drawers seems to work better than more common metaphors of filters, eyeglasses, or lenses, which emphasize the visual dimension while suggesting the illusion of being able to control which lenses, eyeglasses or filters I might be using. The metaphor of the chest of drawers places the projections inside me. The drawers serve as spaces and territories I inhabit or which inhabit me.

Sometimes I imagine the drawers as animated, sliding out of my body. I can pull them out or they may pop out on their own. Some drawers have well-worn runners while others are rarely opened. Some are difficult to open or stuck closed for a time. Several drawers can be open at once. Drawers can open and close unconsciously or consciously, on their own or in response to volition. The drawers can open when they are ready, or when we consciously invoke them. They may stay closed longer than we want them to and we can close them if we don't feel ready to deal with their content. For example, a peek at particular contents of the memory drawer might be too powerful for us to open fully at a certain time. However, it may prove comforting to know that the memories inside are no longer totally repressed. The drawer can be opened when we are ready. The drawers affect us all the time, whether open or closed. Since something is going on at all times in every drawer, we can invite our drawers' contents into consciousness and discover something about ourselves.

We all have our favorite drawers. My personal favorites are the emotion, sensation, story, ritual, archetype, and spiritual drawers. Least familiar for me are the analytic, developmental pattern, and decisiveness drawers. Sometimes I rely on the drawer that is most comfortable or familiar to me. One witness might habitually pull out her drawer of emotions as she experiences a mover. Another might consistently inhabit his

sensation drawer. Sometimes my experience introduces me to a new drawer while watching my partner, or I may choose a drawer that is less familiar to me in order to meet my partner more fully. When my response comes from a different drawer than the mover's, it may enable her to reflect on her movement from a new perspective. I may see a mover hanging her head, and project that she feels sad, using the emotion drawer. Or I might be in my sensation drawer and imagine the stretch of the movement. I might be in the visual drawer and appreciate the curve of her neck. I might later discover from the mover that she was simply loosening her neck.

Sharing between mover and witness is itself an aspect of the active imagination process. It also proves to be a dialogue between the conscious self and the unconscious material discovered in moving or witnessing. Even while owning my projections I must still decide what and how to share with the mover and what to contain. For example, if I see humor in my partner's movement and she is serious, I must discern how much humor to express to her. At other times humor might be an appropriate balance. Even when we describe another's movement in the simplest way, the choice of what we describe and the words we use are based on our projections, on the drawer or drawers through which our experience is shaped and held.

The chest of drawers image serves us in other ways. The awareness that I am functioning within a drawer can enable me to be less identified with the specific contents of that drawer. For example, if I fall into a terrifying memory, telling myself that I am in the emotion drawer enables me to distance myself from the particular conditions of the memory and provides a larger context for that experience.

The chest of drawers also reminds us that there is a larger container, a larger Self with which we can identify, rather than identifying with only one drawer or just a few familiar ones. We are multiple in our modes of perceiving, and capable of a greater range of modes than we believe. Leaving out unfamiliar aspects results in not fully inhabiting our larger Self. It shortchanges the individuation process. The chest of drawers metaphor reminds us that we are not the limited self we often think we are. Looking at the chest of drawers as a whole helps us see ourselves as capable of multiplicity and diversity beyond our ordinary range. For example, Jung's (1967) psychological typology—attitude-types (introverted and extroverted)—and function-types (thinking, feeling, sensation, intuition) can be conceived of as drawers. Jung's (1967) intention was to denote certain preferences or beginning places within each of us. At the same time the types offer possibilities within the spectrum of our wholeness to move toward and inhabit whatever has been in shadow, other drawers to open, other aspects of our being to explore.

Gardner (1987) writes of multiple intelligences. His list is based on different ways of experiencing and learning: linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and bodily-kinesthetic intelligences; he later added existential and naturalist intelligences. His list assists us, but can limit us when thinking about the whole chest of drawers. Jung's (1967) psychological types may also prove limiting in their categories. Even the usual understanding of the senses—sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste—leaves out the senses of the kinesthetic and the proprioceptive, as well as pressure and temperature. There are many ways to categorize these multiple modes of knowing. Any such list can be added to a working list of drawers if one finds them helpful.

During brainstorming exercises in advanced training groups we came up with over a hundred possible drawers, including ritual, atmosphere, altering states, nature,

erotic, journey, other cultures, energy, fairy tales, play, dreams, animals, shadow, choreography, and landscapes. For example, the mythic drawer might inspire the witness to experience the movement that unfolds before them as taking place between gods and goddesses, in which something came to be in the world by the very movement the witness is observing. We created these exercises as an educational tool, both to expand the awareness of the kinds of drawers we inhabit as well as to let participants know that the list of drawers is practically infinite. The list is not fixed and should never be.

How we conceive this approach to movement reflects the projections we have about this work as a whole. Whether or not we are aware of it, we have projections and proclivities about our philosophies, which come from the drawers we are used to or believe work best. Some believe the emotions drawer is the most important aspect of this work. Others are more interested in the sensation and kinesthesia drawers. There are those who base their understanding on the diagnostic and repair drawers. Others tend to activate the self-healing drawer. Others again work from their intuition drawer, purposely keeping the practice open and evolving rather than fixed and static. Awareness of our projections at this broadest level is essential to doing this work. Otherwise our very approach can be so unconscious that it no longer serves us; we serve it. Honoring the multiplicity and diversity that is in each of us is essential to the formation of our theories. Otherwise they are not inclusive.

In Contemplative Dance we seek ways to give everyone a place in this practice. The combination of drawers that each person accesses is idiosyncratic, based on one's own individuating uniqueness. While being at the service of our larger Self, or of something larger than self, is our goal, being at the service of an orthodoxy that we create is not. Accessing the larger Self lies at the heart of our moving and witnessing practice. It is a spiritual practice, a mindfulness meditation. As a witness, noticing how I perceive and project enables me to be present in a nonjudgmental way to myself and to my mover. It allows me to have more compassion as each of us unfolds in our unique, sacred way.

The chest of drawers metaphor is not offered to take away from the simplicity of the practice nor to make it more complex. Rather it is meant to point to the many levels or dimensions of what is always going on. Noticing and identifying different drawers can inform all aspects of the moving and witnessing process. Recognizing the multiple modes present in ourselves and in others helps us grow and individuate, both in the studio and in everyday life.

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