

Listen Carefully

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Abstract

Voice and sounding is an integrated element in dramatherapy, as in acting and life in general. In this article I reflect on voicework that focuses on the intimate relationship between breathing, sounding and an embodied sense of self. The notion of *listen carefully* emphasises the receptive aspect of arts practice and introversion as a foundation for authentic and healthy expression. I address ‘the presence of absence’ and our ability to listen with awareness to what is implicit and not yet made conscious. I have been inspired by feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero who proposes a philosophy of voice that challenges logo-centric Western philosophical thinking. Her work underpins the relationship between voice and identity. I shall draw from my experience of three different approaches that integrate vocal somatic exploration and a holistic approach to life and health. These are the legacy of Roy Hart and Alfred Wolfsohn, Movement with touch and sound (Sesame), and Fitzmaurice Voicework®. This article caters for a broad professional community that is interested in the field of voice in drama and theatre practice for educational and therapeutic purposes.

Key words: dramatherapy, voicework, healthy self-regulation, philosophy of voice, Roy Hart and Alfred Wolfsohn, Sesame approach, Fitzmaurice voicework®

Introduction

Each individual has their unique way of breathing which for most people enables sounding. As dramatherapists we relate to body, breathing and voice in many ways. This article will present how voicework has become a core field of interest for me as a drama practitioner, teacher, therapist and researcher. Music therapist Diane Austin points out the lack of literature that addresses ‘the physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual benefits of using voice and singing in therapy and effectiveness

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of vocal interventions' (2008, p. 19). I share Austin's surprise as sounding and singing is, and has evidently been since the beginnings of time, such an important way to relate to the world, to express ourselves and share experiences through communities and rituals. Voicing oneself, aurally and metaphorically, is an extensive aspect of dramatherapy, as in other arts therapies' traditions. Frankie Armstrong refers to finding 'the unique voice that lives inside us all'. I agree with her that '[t]he exhilaration that goes with "finding one's voice" in the literal sense has not little to do with finding one's voice in the metaphoric sense' (1996, p. 77). Voice and identity formation are deeply interlinked, also on a cellular level. Based on my experiential voice journey over the last ten years I have become more and more curious about the physicality of the body and how our biology longs for self-healing and well-being. The kind of *careful listening* that I want to encourage deals with a deep yearning for healthy self-regulation. I propose that it is intentional, striving towards psychophysical self-regulation and healthy brain integration.

Methodology

My researcher's lens is narrative inquiry which claims that no knowledge is created in isolation and that identities are in 'flux' (Bruner 2004). This methodology emphasises the subjective, socially constructed narrative as poly-vocal and reflexive (Gergen and Gergen 2000, p. 1037). Kim Etherington (2004) advocates reflexive research practice that promotes an expanded and embodied concept of cognition which implies engaging ourselves as subject-object in the studied processes (p. 16). This acknowledges situational, subjective meaning-making and draws attention to the formative processes of *listen carefully* that take place before language and representational thinking. Patricia Leavy (2009) encourages researchers to 'actively use and account for their emotions (and other aspects of subjective experience)' (p. 19). For her, narrative inquiry suits research that negotiates the specific and multi-layered, experientially lived world. The phenomenal approach complements narrative inquiry and supports the understanding of voice in flux transgressing the personal-subjective and the transpersonal-objective. My aim is to share emerging professional implications based on my personal voice journey. What started as a wish to learn *how* to sing soon grew into a deeply felt curiosity about

the realm of voice, health and identity formation. My self-critical and shame-bound assumptions about learning techniques and getting it right were dramatically challenged. I was strengthened to locate myself in another epistemic realm of a deeper curiosity and acknowledgement of my own subjectivity in flux and as poly-vocal. With the notion of *listen carefully* I emphasise the aspect of introversion, only to honour the pleasure of freeing the breathing and sounding into space.

The philosophical and practice-based perspectives that are interwoven throughout this article fill a gap between arts and health practices. I propose that it points towards future clinical and artistic practices that are substantiated by recent scientific research. In the first part of the article, I present and identify the philosophical perspectives on vocal expression. In the second part, I introduce three relevant approaches to voicework discussing the practical dimensions of voice in dramatherapy with the term *listen carefully* as backdrop. .

The presence of absence

I advocate a shift of focus from the active and expressive aspect of arts' practice to the passive and receptive aspect. This is rooted in the whole body, from bones to organs and nerves to the surface. In short, I want to favour *being* over *doing*. According to existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre (1969) becoming is a state of total being that can only be apprehended as known through the awareness of what is *not* (p. 630). Phenomenologist philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty's concept of 'tacit cogito' suggests something similar and encourages holistic ways of knowing that evades rational language articulation and dissemination. The Latin term he proposes might translate to silent thinking or silent sense of self. Merleau-Ponty (2006) writes that '[b]ehind the spoken *cogito* ... there lies a tacit *cogito*, myself experienced by myself' (p. 469). Attachment researcher and pioneer in the field of interpersonal neurobiology Daniel J. Siegel (2007) writes that the 'the mind itself can be defined as an embodied and relational process that regulates the flow of energy and information' (p. 111). He distinguishes different types of attention and claims that conventional research on attention is focused on 'tasks that are active in nature: attending to a stimulus, flexibility alerting attention when stimuli change unexpectedly, handling conflictual streams of information' (p. 110). *Listen carefully* addresses a different kind of attention, what Siegel calls 'mindful awareness' (p. 110). This kind of attention has

a different quality and is geared to the process of receptivity and meta-awareness (p. 110). It resonates with practical approaches that train embodied listening and direct proprioceptive and neuro-perceptive awareness of phenomena without interpretation and pre-given representational concepts. To a large degree, language and how we learn to think about things decides how we are able to use our imagination to form new concepts. Robert Witkin (1974) coined the term *the intelligence of feeling* to identify the process of how we ‘use imagination infused with our intuitive feeling for form, particularly in the realization of new *feeling forms*’ (Ross 1984, p. 20). Witkin and Ross’ ‘poetic competence’ or ‘sensibility’ (p. 18) resonates with Siegel (2011) and others’ more recent findings in the field of interpersonal neurobiology, emphasising healthy self-regulation and the integration of body, mind and brain that is fundamental to how we are able to shift gear, change patterns and be flexible in thinking and behaviour.

Listen carefully represents a focus towards what happens inside the body towards the processes that takes place before and are different from conceptual articulation and understanding. What comes *before* or *first* is what Malcolm Ross (1984) terms the ‘aesthetic impulse’ which describes our ‘incessant and restless seeking after pattern, order and meaning in the world’ (p. 9). As sense-making experience in the ‘potential space’ (Winnicott 1971) the feed-back loop of impulse and form claims art as way of knowing, centred in embodied meaning in the sensuous form (p. 16). This understanding of aesthetic practice and experience resonates with the Aristotelian concept *Poesis*, our capacity to shape experience through imagination (Levine 2009, p. 9). In the terminology of the Jungian Sesame approach to drama and movement therapy the yearning for self-regulation of the psyche is understood as the ‘soul journey’. For Carl Gustav Jung the creative life force of the libido is necessary for individuation or ‘natural transformation’ to take place through symbols of rebirth (Stevens 1995, p. 60). Jung (1972) writes about our ‘relationship to that inner friend of the soul into whom Nature herself would like to change us – that other person who we also are and yet can never attain completely’ (p. 76).

‘Esse is Percipi’

In *The Soul's Code* (1996) James Hillman elaborates on what it means to 'be seen with the heart' in the chapter entitled 'Esse is Percipi', Latin for, 'to be is to be perceived' (p. 113). Hillman explains that this way of 'seeing' is not about what is really visible to the eye but about what is not visible in the sense of 'hidden' or absent because it is not yet born, but a potential like an *acorn* (p. 115). This concept resembles what I identified above as the aesthetic impulse (Ross 1984, p. 9) which is intuitive and latent *before* mediation into form. This kind of *presence of absence* is there as something potential, not yet conscious for the individual. Hillman (2007) argues that each individual must open up to be touched and moved by the soul of the world. For Hillman, it is through the belonging and connection to the world that the individual recovers his or her lost soul and 'the thought of the heart' (pp. 3-7). The process of soul-making in archetypal psychology takes place in the dialectical relationship between each individual soul and the soul of the world. For Hillman (2007) it entails imaginative deepening into both the human soul and *Anima Mundi*, the soul of the world (pp. 101-106). Artistic and creative practices inspired from this realm honour the subjective experience of deep inner listening that touches and feels recognised by 'something' inter-subjective that has meaning. For the purpose of health and well-being, it is of less importance how this phenomenon is framed in artistic, medical or spiritual boxes.

From being *seen* to being *heard*

As arts' practitioners and therapists we know experientially how this kind of embodied knowledge production works and that there are many possible ways to the powerful experience of 'magic' transformation and insight. With my focus on voice and listening I shall now dwell on the physical voice and shift attention from being *seen* to being *heard*. In our culture there is a tradition to understand perception as primarily visual. According to feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero this convention of favouring image over sound is characteristic for the Western tradition. In her book *For More than One Voice – Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression* (2005) she claims that the human voice has been silenced as an autonomous meaning-making agent in Western culture and considered unimportant as a philosophical topic since Plato (p. 39). Cavarero explains that the vocal dimension gets 'lost' in the metaphysical thinking that understands knowing as the revelation of ideas 'behind'

the appearance. She writes that, '[m]etaphysics has always dreamed of a videocentric order of pure signifiers. Verbal signification is, from this perspective, a hindrance – especially when it unfolds acoustically in vocal speech' (p. 40).

Historically, Cavarero explains, our culture has moved towards an increasing hegemonic status of image over sound (p. 42). She is critical to the way the logo-centric tradition of Western philosophy uncritically disregards sounding and privileges semantics over sound – mind over body. According to Cavarero, vocal expression is charged with unique and situated cultural meaning; political, social, personal, artistic and emotional. Her main point is that the voice 'always puts forward first of all the *who* of saying' (2005, p. 30). Cavarero's conceptual framework highlights voice and vocal production as a hyper-potent research area transgressing conventional fields of philosophy, the arts and medicine. It points out that vocal expression and identity are social constructions, yet invites the supremacy of biological and embodied creation of meaning. Another feminist philosopher Karen Barad (2003) argues that this way of thinking brings 'to the forefront important questions of ontology, materiality, and agency' (p. 803). This philosophical approach offers an important perspective of the self-regulating psyche as a material, dynamic, relational and per-formative process. Agency is not an attribute to the world but the on-going refiguring of the world (Barad 2008, p. 137).

Listening to practice: mapping the grounds for integrative practice

In dramatherapy practice breathing, sounding and voicework is integrated naturally with more or less intentional focus depending on the therapist's choices and the client group. Voicework practice is basically two-fold. On the one hand, it is about vocal production, directed outwards. This includes how we use our voice to explore vocal range and possibilities, when sounding, singing and speaking, on stage, as public speakers or in life in general. On the other hand, voicework is about listening and receptive attention, directed inwards. This includes tuning into somatic processes of all kinds; how we are silent and aware of silence; how we are present and attuned to others, ourselves and the planet. As in play and drama the core might be pinned down to the oscillation of introversion and extroversion in the fluid state of being and becoming. The three experiential approaches that I shall reflect on all encourage deep, inner listening and 'mindful awareness' (Siegel 2007, p. 110).

1. The legacy of Alfred Wolfsohn and Roy Hart

When I was first introduced to the improvisational voicework of the Alfred Wolfsohn/Roy Hart approach I was inspired to embark on a path towards deeper self-knowledge and soul searching. There was ‘something’ in the integration of voice and play that seemed to guide my embodied self intuitively. It not only challenged my assumptions of a so-called beautiful voice but also my learnt beliefs and ideas about learning and self-development. The experience reminded me of my dramatherapy training, touching the soul, coming home and feeling welcomed into some deeper, corporal sense-making layers in me. South African actor Roy Hart (1926-1975) was the pupil of Alfred Wolfsohn (1896-1962). They represent two generations of pioneering voicework throughout the twentieth century that still has prominent importance today through The Roy Hart International Arts Centre in the South of France (CAIRH 2014). As a German soldier during the First World War, Wolfsohn witnessed the extreme human voices of wounded and dying soldiers in the trenches. After the war he experimented with healing his own traumatic, aural hallucinations by expressing similar vocal sounds (Uhlig & Baker 2011, p. 27). Hart continued his work and brought it into actor training in the 1960s. The integration and intersection of artistic and therapeutic practices were embedded in this approach from the start and according to Felicity Baker and Sylvia Uhlig (2011) have been incorporated into the work of music therapy (p. 27). However, the emphasis of the official pedagogy today is leaning towards artistic practice, still representing a deep understanding of the intimate relationship between voice and personal identity (Pikes 2004, p. 71).

2. Wolfsohn’s fundamental notion was that the voice is the mirror of the soul (Pikes 2004, p. 32).

He was inspired by Jung’s thinking and the transpersonal imaginative legacy of the archetypes as a pool for investigating and expanding the individual’s many voices. Wolfsohn and Hart developed a pedagogy that supports each individual in exploring the many, potential selves and give these vocal form. My experience with the Wolfsohn/Hart legacy has offered opportunities to explore these many vocal selves, as an expanded repertoire. This is near dramatherapy practice that explores archetypal characters in myth and story enactment. Frankie Armstrong (1996, p. 76) writes about the delight of non-verbal myth enactment either

silent or with sounding that connects with gravity from the soles of the feet (rather than from the tops of the heads). The ‘meaningless’ sounds that emerge from story images are potentially indefinite and all uniquely located in each person’s body directly touching the neural pathways and patterns, challenging socially constructed habits and defences. When framed safely this kind of messy voicework provides an opening for new discoveries about ‘finding one’s voice’ and letting oneself be heard by a supporting community. As part of a research in practice project in Norway, 2009-2013, (Bruun & Wright 2013, p. 67) Wolfsohn/Hart exercises of improvisational sounding were explored individually, in pairs and as a group, as vocal responses to images on postcards and other images. After the participants had each chosen and fixed one voice that was shared with the group, every individual painted this voice as they imagined it in shapes and colours on to a full size body silhouette of themselves. From this projected visual form the improvisational exploration continued by responding creatively with contrasting expressions and further vocal explorations. This kind of integration of visual and aural dimensions is potent for integrative arts’ therapy and in dramatherapy practice. In the above mentioned project the play with visual and tactile media supported the participants in their vocal risk-taking and creativity. The contribution of the Wolfsohn/Hart legacy has been most important when it comes to the non-prescriptive invitation of challenging the socially adapted vocal identity. New and unheard voices emerge and surface from un-known inner and inter-subjective realms. This creative investigation of broadening the expressive repertoire and softening rigid personality structures resonates with other arts’ practice and with dramatherapy. Movement with touch and sound (Sesame Drama and Movement therapy)

During my dramatherapy training in the Sesame approach (SI 2014) at The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London (CSSD 2014) I was introduced to *Movement with touch and sound*. This method is unique to the Sesame approach and integrates voice and sounding as meaning-making processes liberated from verbal language communication. In the Sesame approach the Jungian notion of the self-regulating psyche striving for a healthy balanced wellbeing is central. The key to ‘open Sesame’ is the embodied metaphor and processes that are not ‘colonized’ by logo-centric concepts. Sesame encourages mythos and holistic sense-making processes that animate deep inner

listening. Since 1964 Sesame practitioners have pioneered the field of drama and movement in therapy in the UK and internationally (Jones 1996, p. 86). Marian (Billy) Lindquist, the founder, was clear from the beginning about the potential for self-healing through the body's own knowing and knowledge production. The approach understands therapy in the Jungian sense of individuation and self-regulation of the psyche with metaphor as holding form. Initially Lindquist developed *Movement with touch and sound*, MTS, with people who were mentally disabled and the method was further developed in settings where clients' verbal language was poor (Pearson 1996, p. 55). According to recent research (Porter 2014) the emphasis on sounding has varied over the years but is now an integrated element in the method (p. 33). With reference to the unborn and new-born child our primary needs for touch *and* sound are the inspiration (p. 33). Sound is also understood as a 'way of "touching" a person (p. 33).

MTS is basically one-to-one response and communication that bypasses the 'normal channels of speech, sight and sound' (Pearson 1996, p. 55). It is a non-invasive way of working with people addressing deprivation of early movement experience. Trust building, mirroring, mismatching and amplification through the body are key methods (Porter 2014, p. 39). With reference to Jung and a research study, Sesame practitioner Rachel Porter (2014) writes, MTS 'is a subject that embodies the most basic and transcendent levels of relationship with self and other, that aims to expand experience through voice and body, without the need for words' (p. 41). MTS is informed by intuitive and somatic presence including awareness of what is *not*. With reference to Lindquist, Porter emphasises that the initiative comes from the client (p. 34). The role of the facilitator is to *listen carefully* – not to push, but to 'allow spontaneous happenings to arise and authentically follow the client's process' (p. 34). This kind of safe playfulness resonates with Austin's (2008) vocal holding technique that is initiated from the therapist singing in *unison* with the client before moving into spontaneous improvisation once the client relaxes and is ready (p. 148-157). In MTS the same principle is at stake, intuitively prompted by the client in dialogue with inviting initiatives from the therapist. Depending on the client and the intervention circumstances this method is also practiced in silence and without vocal production. However, moving together in the therapeutic relationship puts breathing at the centre and

highlights the notion of *careful listening* in dramatherapy. Another related dramatherapy method is Neuro-Dramatic-Play developed in recent years by Sue Jennings (2011) based on substantiated knowledge of attachment patterns and early development. Jennings also acknowledges the role of the voice and deep listening in the formation of safe mother-child interaction in the potential space, especially through rhythmic play (p. 78). As in Austin's vocal holding and MTS the 'language' is corporal and vocalised directly from the body. The juxtaposition of touch and sound implies voicing *as* touch and the social materiality of vocal production, so crucial to Cavarero's point about voice and sense of unique identity. Porter (2014, p. 39) uses the term 'implicit relational knowing' with reference to Lyons-Ruth et al. (1998) to describe the competence of the therapist. *as* witness and co-creator following and *listening* to the client's *implicit* yearning and need. As a technique MTS is extremely simple, yet demanding. Its success depends on the communal ability of therapist/client to be present in authentic play together.

3. Fitzmaurice Voicework®

Finally, I will introduce the Fitzmaurice voicework founded and developed since the seventies by Irish/American actress Catherine Fitzmaurice (Fitzmaurice 2014). This is a comprehensive, body-based approach to voice that includes working with breathing and embodied vocal production for acting but not exclusively. This approach promotes specific elements that draw directly on physical reflexes to encourage body-awareness and free breathing. The aim is to develop healthy vocal habits based on two complementary elements called Destructuring and Restructuring. Destructuring helps develop freedom in the voice and Restructuring to develop focus and clarify of thought and emotion in oral communication (Watson & Nayak 2014, p. 149). An important element is rooted in bioenergetics and Wilhelm Reich's legacy of body-based therapies (Morgan 2012, p. 27). At an early stage Catherine Fitzmaurice began to adapt and integrate Reich's work in her voice teaching practice. Later she integrated other body-based disciplines and energy work, such as yoga, shiatsu and healing techniques. Furthermore her approach is firmly located in classical, 'conventional' Western actor training. According to Michael K. Morgan (2012) the 'currency of Fitzmaurice Voicework is rooted in its ability to traverse venues because of its intricate weaving of Eastern and Western theories into a

practical discipline that has wide application (p. 1). In the US Fitzmaurice voicework is well established in actor training and public speaking. The first European teacher certification programme finished in London 2014 and this work is currently being integrated into acting programs and universities in several European countries. As practitioner I have experimented a little with integration the FV into dramatherapy. One of the Fitzmaurice deconstructing positions is the ‘standing tremor®’ which is obtained by inducing tension in (soft) legs until they start involuntary shaking. Then ask the student to stay with the experience of the body trembling and breathe with whatever pattern they sense occurs. Exercises for Restructuring might be text work with lines, poems and storytelling, working on being present and able to ‘show up’ with all of oneself. Learning lines and improvise, taste/touch them with all parts of the body-mind, sounding in gibberish and ‘non-sense’ is also an important part of Fitzmaurice voicework which is familiar to dramatherapy practice. A further investigation about the integration of Fitzmaurice voicework in practical dramatherapy contexts is, in my view, exciting future practice as research. Its transformative value for releasing tension, healing trauma and building healthy psycho-physical regulation is thoroughly explored in practice for decades and substantiated by emerging interdisciplinary research (Morgan 2012, Watson & Nayak 2014). The Fitzmaurice Voicework might complement dramatherapy practice where clients’ needs are grounding, slowing down and adjusting the stimulation of the Autonomic Nervous System. The deconstructing practice enhances a ‘dialogue’ between the sympathetic and the parasympathetic parts of the ANS. The restructuring process shapes the ‘chaos’ into form with the support of the Central Nervous System. The oscillating between deconstructing and restructuring triggers the exploration of unconscious psychosomatic layers, a process that over time softens and releases entrenched muscular tensions holding blocked psychic energy (Morgan 2012, p. 37). The work enhances deep inner listening, mindful awareness and meta-awareness of one’s sense of identity. According to Morgan the Fitzmaurice method offers a ground-breaking practical philosophy that ‘heals the post Cartesian mind/body split through harmonizing the autonomic nervous system with the central nervous system while preserving the innate density of the experience that is expressed’ (p. 134). The focus on communication and the

deep need for sharing and of being perceived by an audience has much potential bearing for dramatherapy practice. This resonates with dramatherapist David Read Johnson's DvT (Developmental Transformations) (Sajani 2012) and the context of relational aesthetics in dramatherapy (p. 10). For health promotion, identity and trauma work the Fitzmaurice voicework is extremely efficient and deep in my experience because of the physical specificities that loosen up rigidity and unhealthy tension in body and mind. This is clearly a field for further research as dynamic and vital regulation depends on flexibility and equilibrium (Siegel 2007).

To sum up this section, the three approaches to voicework that I have presented all draw attention to the vibrancy of the whole body as a dynamic agent that intentionally seeks health through psychophysical and neurobiological self-regulation. A non-prescriptive and non-judgemental attitude to the creative process is an important common ground. None of these would accept being labelled as techniques, methods or 'answers' to a problem. Another common thread is that the works and thinking of Jung is of communal inspiration, Fitzmaurice voicework including (Morgan 2011, p. 133). For Jung alchemy as holistic practice represented individuation and natural transformation. In alchemy the multi-layered understanding of the exoteric and esoteric, as physical and psychological, is immanent. Jung, as others of his generation, represented a Western medic and thinker that pioneered creative practices and holistic healing work by pioneering the integration of oriental and occidental knowledge traditions (Coward 1985, p. 85). For Jung the archetype of rebirth incorporates the alchemical principle of soul and body as primary unity rather than opposites (Franz 1984, p. 121).

Conclusion

In this article I have presented and elaborated my understanding of the concept *listen carefully*. I have framed it in the thinking of feminist philosopher Cavarero. Cavarero's contribution is significant as it challenges how we think about vocal expression. The purpose of my appeal to *listen carefully* tests the hegemony of logo-centric language. It transgresses the façade of patriarchal power-structures and

socio-political strata to the realm of the *absent* and *silenced voices*. In Jungian and archetypal terminology this might be regarded as the shadow and the marginalised, not surprisingly mostly related to the feminine and unconscious in the Western cultural heritage. The feminist perspective reminds us of how entrenched rigid power-structures dominates learning and our perceptions of ourselves as human beings split from and in conflict with nature, including nature within us. Cavarero's view underpins a relational and participatory ontology insisting on the 'corporeality of the voice' (p. xxii). She writes that 'the voice not only dethrones the "subject" of traditional metaphysics, but it renders this subject ridiculous' (2005, p. 30). This kind of thinking jells with informed practice that remains reflexive and somatically mindful of its own 'presence of absence' and social construction equally. *Listen carefully* proposes a relational onto-epistemic perspective that encourages entering unknown territories with creative curiosity and risk taking that confronts pre-wired logocentric thinking structures. Searching for answers and explanations are different from authentic curiosity striving towards what is *not* and perceiving the presence of absence. Imagination is what is *not yet perceivable* which is embedded in the act of *Poesis*. This is equally essential for Art as a way knowing as for healing trauma. It takes courage to change mind-set and listen to the calling from within. It represents a sensitised awareness of what Hillman (2007) calls the *Anima Mundi*, the soul of the world. On the one hand, *listen carefully* proposes lateral, horizontal and rhizomatic, culturally responsive awareness, and on the other it invites gravity and the transcendence of vertical awareness. It is focused on the inside of the inside only to mirror the outside and recognising the nature in me outside me and in other living beings.

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