

STILLNESS MANIFESTO

by Shabari Rao

Stillness is disruption.

To be perfectly still is to cause disruption at a cosmic level.

Luckily, we can never be perfectly still. Even in death there is movement.
But we can be still enough and can cause disruption enough.

Stillness disrupts capitalism

The minute you are still, you stop being productive. When you stop moving, you no longer progress. And, in stillness, you disrupt what it means to perform. Progress, performance and productivity are the pillars on which capitalism is built. Sometimes even in stillness we become obsessed with these capitalist imperatives. Questions like – *Is this stillness good enough? Am I getting better? When will I get to the real stillness? Is this all a waste of time? Or am I getting something out of this?* – begin to plague us. But stillness has a way of rendering such questions insignificant. The only way to appreciate stillness is to free it from capitalist expectations.

Stillness disrupts our sense of self

Stillness is an unfamiliar state for the body. The body becomes a landscape that is unfamiliar. You have to relearn how to walk when it is done extremely slowly. Standing becomes a challenge. When something you have taken for granted, something so invisible, so simple, proves difficult to do, it is unsettling. It disrupts the familiar sense of body. Stillness also disrupts a sense of identity. Because we identify with what we do, what we make. We might be familiar with being still in a passive way while watching TV for example, or in an active way while waiting to get the perfect shot of a bird, maybe. But we are still doing something. So, who am I when I am not doing anything?

Stillness disrupts what it means to care

Stillness in times of crisis is not looking away, it is not turning a blind eye. It is not an act of passivity. It is looking directly *at*. Stillness forces us to confront where the care is really needed. To offer care in a state of agitation or anxiety is to act from a place of volatility. Because, in times of crisis it is easy to become anxious; when one is anxious it is easy to be manipulated. It is therefore crucial to find stillness in times of crisis. Stillness in fact, creates energy. And that energy can propel care work that is meaningful and sustainable. Care that responds to that which needs it the most.

Stillness disrupts relationships of power

A child on the supermarket floor. A man standing in Taksim Square. The youth of a country lying on their backs. Thousands of farmers refusing to go home. The simple act of refusing to budge: physically, ethically. Stillness is the genesis of non-violent resistance.

Stillness disrupts our sense of time

In stillness, time stretches, and folds, and thickens and ruptures. It is impossible to tell how much time has passed. Because does time even ‘pass’?

Stillness disrupts...

So, what does this imperfect stillness feel like?

It can be

- a fidgety stillness
- a tired stillness
- a deep stillness
- a wobbly stillness
- a focused stillness
- a stillness that is off balance
- a deathlike stillness
- an alert stillness
- an energising stillness
- a noisy stillness

If we know that we are not aiming for perfect stillness, then we can savour the many different flavours of imperfect stillness.

Movement:

We are moving all the time. We are used to being in a state of movement. We ascribe value to movement – it suggests progress, development, achievement. Movement is towards a goal. Even if that goal is to slow down! And the pace of that movement has got faster and faster as time goes by.

Slowing Down:

Stopping is tough. There is a momentum to our thoughts, our days, our bodily rhythm that makes it difficult to simply stop. So, we slow down, a little bit. For just a breath. There is an infinite distance between moving and stillness and slowly we can explore that vastness.

Stillness:

We never arrive at a state of perfect stillness. But slowing down can become so deep that it feels like stillness. Now, stillness becomes as a sort of magnifying glass. When the big rushing movements of thought, emotion and body slow down, the little, hidden, subtle things begin to show themselves. Like a shy creature of the night time, these things emerge when other things subside. And if you look too quickly, they might hide again, but if you sit awhile, they will come and sit next to you.

Moving again:

Now we have a scale between movement and stillness that we can explore in greater and greater detail, making it possible to come back to movement with a clear and tangible experience of what it means to be still.

“In order to understand the dance one must be still. And in order to truly understand stillness one must dance.”
— Rumi.