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Colorado, USA & Namibia
Zoom.

Interviewee: Barbara Dilley

Interviewer: Nicola Visser

Notes: My own emphasis is added to transcription. I use dashed lines for pauses - when Barbara was formulating the patterned quality of experience that waits to find expression in words. I appreciate the rhythm they provide, the rest that allows meaning to land and resonate.

“Naming it after you find yourself there.”

“It cuts something.

It stops the grab so that the grab is not so strong and it lets the seeing happen in a big field of awareness.”

Nicola Visser: Thank you for being here.

Barbara Dilley: Thank you for arranging it.

NV: It's the end of the day here and the middle of the day for you.

BD: What time is it?

NV: Eight in the evening.

BD: Where about are you in Africa?

NV: Windhoek, Namibia.

BD: So it's the Southern part. It must be summer and hot.

NV: Very much so. It's about 40 degrees. I don't know what that is in Fahrenheit.
You have to keep your calm

BD: We have it very cold and snowy here.

NV: Do you enjoy that?

BD: It's ok, I am not a big fan of snow - but you know if you wear lots of layers - as I get older I can less and less keep myself warm - ginger tea helps.

NV: Yes

NV: Barbara, thank you for responding so brightly to what I was writing about and especially that you recognised what I was feeling toward - which is the work with the eyes. I would love to hear you speak more about how that particular balance is for you at the moment of direct focusing and peripheral vision.

BD: Right. It comes up from a study and practice I do with Tibetan Buddhism. There are various instructions about working with the eyes that has always intrigued me - but ah - the one that comes up - — - in some of the more - - -timeless awareness practices - —has a quality of — and this is not the language that is used in the instruction that I have been given— but i recognise it through the experience of beginning to balance direct looking with peripheral vision. And I think this came about, you know when I was teaching more regularly. There were different ways i would encourage people to explore them and it was to mingle them together and not be fixating on just one but let the attention pull you back and forth and then with your awareness recognise: OH this is the space between - OH this is direct looking - so sort of naming it, naming it after you find yourself there.

So anyway, I began to realise through various teachings that I had, that this *quality* of mingling direct looking and peripheral vision is a way of.. of *letting awareness expand in the environment. And still being awake.*

So um, the instructions that are given with this latest teacher I have been studying with— he talks about not being OUT OUT not being IN IN but IN. And I think, for me when I cultivate direct looking and then deeply relax that experience - like really relaxing around the eyeball and across the forehead - and cultivating - - first of all seeing - there is a sense that *my place of seeing has dropped in* somewhat

But not out-out . You know - so I just realised that moving around in space - I think that maybe a way of — - stabilising the eye practices - is - - learning to play back and forth on that edge between direct seeing and peripheral vision - which is so so fascinating for me as a mover - -peripheral seeing - always was - I always felt it was very important in my training - not in improvisation or when i came to Naropa or teaching - but in the improvisational play and work. So that is basically it.

NV: Yes. It's a bit like when you speak about it or when you give an invitation in your book. What I so appreciate is that it's almost like being given a little piece of silver - very thin - like a bird might sing - and then there is not any weight to it, just clarity. And then through playing and practice, there is a deepening, an understanding, that doesn't fall into the place of words - of what is really happening - and it is very exciting.

BD: Yes yes and that idea of not being able to give language or concept to the experience is very much a part of these - Formless Practices in Tibetan *Buddhajñana* you know they are constantly talking about this experience that is not easy to describe because as soon as you bring things down into language there is a sense of having solidified something that is more fluid and wavelike and not a dark space so to speak.

NV: When you were speaking now...I love this one - about your teacher saying not Out Out, not In In, but In.....made me think of something to share when I am playing with this practice of the eyes - softening under the eyes - something else is cultivated - maybe I am reading into it, but I feel - a kindness to myself as well as to the world. And when I am at the edge - from moving in Open Space - going in and out - it is very useful to me - in that moment of

'terror' of 'I am going in now' THAT practice seems to hold it all - and seems to soften and excite.

BD: Yeah. I think a little structure in those moments of terror as you call them. I have been thinking a lot about these moments of transition. When there is transition — it is very helpful to have just some kind of discipline or structure that we can give to our sense perception in our, in our, you know, knowing-ness. It can really be helpful.

And the other one that can really be helpful is also based on Tibetan Buddhist eye practices which is seeing before you name something.

NV: Yes

BD: That instruction is looking like a child before entering a shrine room. Now you have to have some experience with Tibetan *Buddhajana* shrines, but they are extremely complex and elaborate - brocades and objects and offering bowls and two or three different levels and tankas and it's hard to know what it is even if you are an adult. And the instruction is to see it as though you were a child seeing it for the first time - is that you don't have any language. So I think a lot of these eye practices where we can be without having to give words to our experience - you know - ..where we can be having a moment of experience without concept basically. Again that comes out of a Tibetan instruction - what is it to relax the thinking mind so much that you are not gripping on to thinking you know. You are softening any sense perceptions. At the back of the book I had a student who developed ear practices - so I think in one of the addendums there are Ear Practices.

NV: Exactly. I am thinking of two different things. One is that balance also seems to coexist with the sympathetic and the parasympathetic nervous system.

BD: Beautiful.

NV: You know, if there is fear, there is the fight or flight and if we can find that balance with that simple muscular intimacy then we can find the balance again (through the rest and digest that can coexist with it) and ...of we go.

BD: Yeah, that's beautiful, yeah. It cuts something, it shifts. It is a real potential to shift back into the present moment.

NV: I am also delighted completely that it is such a tiny tiny place and it's the gateway in a way.

BD: Well. I applaud that a lot more indigenous non Eurocentric traditions view the eyes as the dominant sense - not all of them of course - but it comes up - it is a very powerful organ for survival. Yeah, it is interesting to look into the organ of the eye.

I had herpes complex. It is viral - like cold sores. I had it in the eye, which I had never heard of. And apparently it's quite common. I had never heard of it, and he talked about the eye. It is an extraordinarily powerful organ that has tremendous independence. And it has its own immune system. So when the herpes virus enters the eye's immune system is what goes after the virus. I have a certain diminishment of vision there. I guess you can call it the battle between the virus and immune system that leaves a

lot of scar tissue. And, it was so provocative to learn how powerful and strong the eye is outside of the other organs of the body.

And I think the other thing I have been exploring with the balancing of the direct focusing and peripheral vision is that when I actually feel enough relaxation around the eyeball my upper lip begins to soften.

NV: I know it. Not the upper lip. But, something happens in my jaw - oh oh and in the back of my neck - here - ah it's lovely - it's almost like I rest in the back.

BD: Well the occipital nerve is back here (points to back of head) that edge of the skull is called the occipital edge or something. My language is a little funny. It is very much the eye nerves come back and come down in the back

NV: Yeah we really seem to see or interpret what we see back here. Also I have been listening to Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen - a small thing struck me about - in the spinal cord the motor neurons exit from the front and the sensory neurons enter in the back of the spinal cord. So in order to see - we go out to grab an image, yet we receive it sensorially through the back.

BD: And that is the thing about balancing direct focusing and peripheral vision- is that it cuts the grab.

NV: Yes

BD: It stops the grab so that the grab is not so strong and it lets the seeing happen in a big field of awareness.

NV: And also ..there is something childlike in my understanding of peripheral vision. I was thinking of horses with blinkers so that 'peripheral' was out here (lateral gesture) but 'peripheral' is also above and below and behind and inside. It's exciting that. I have just one question further. In your book and play with mingling the eye practices and in response to the email, you said - 'yes I think there is a 6th eye practice' - and it's just a small thing but I wondered what made it YES this is a practice that becomes number 6?

BD: I am a firm believer in evolution (laughs) things come up and just because I figured out 5 eye practices doesn't mean that it's codified. It's just a matter of evolution and that things evolve and change. And understanding moves along so that all of these practices in my book are evolving.

NV: Are you using this particular practice of balancing in other practices other than dancing .

BD: Ah well, mainly in mind training. It is mainly in my meditative training practice. There is an instruction to actually hold the gaze at horizon level you know, so you are not closed eyes and not *demi* open, its not sort-of open, it is really raised eyelids, and at the level you are relaxing back and spreading out. And in that practice there is also a sense of releasing the jaw and touching the tongue to the back of the front of the back teeth, softening this whole. You are opening the central channel and then your mind - you are relaxing the mind

according to various instructions where there is clarity and awareness but not thinking - thinking is not followed - you don't become captured by it.

NV: Captured and grasping. Thank you Barbara!

BD: Yeah. Thank you for the chat. It is very heart warming for me when people get in touch with me and they say I have been using your practices. Whoops there is my cat - so thank you for that. It is so cheerful - and there are quite a few people in Europe.

NV: I wish there was a way to find each other.

BD: Yes I am interested in some kind of ability to share practices and getting in touch with each other and I can send you the emails I have for people i know in Europe - a woman in Greece who is taking CDP into site specific situations and a woman in Ireland who has been adapting many of the practices to meet a particular community that she works with in Ireland. A lot is outdoors - and there is also a man in Berlin who is doing them - I dont know what form - I think it is in a studio - he primarily teaches contact improvisation and structure improvisation forms.

NV: It would be lovely to find a network and support.

BD: Great. I will send them.

NV: Well , thank you and i wish you a wonderful day

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BD: bye bye