

Contemplative Dance Practice and Open Space

Barbara Dilley specifies three distinct stages in her structure of Contemplative Dance Practice:

- 1) Meditation
 - 2) Personal Awareness Practice
 - 3) Open Space.
- In between are moments of sitting in silence together. I am interested in **OPEN SPACE**. Hence the title of this thesis.

A brief description of Open Space.

It is a group practice in a studio. In Open Space participants create as wide a circle as possible in the studio, seated on the floor. When at this perimeter they adopt the role of witness (Adler 2002), or 'well wisher' or 'onlooker' (Dilley 2020:102). In other words they are watching and holding the space with a particular mode of non-judgemental attention. At any time of their own choosing they stand, bow and enter the space to move. Movement is improvised following impulses from the felt sense of the body. No structure or score is demanded. 'Enter the space and find your moving being' (Dilley in Caldwell 2024). The principle is to encourage the quality of bare attention of the meditative mind in sitting, to continue as a state of readiness in a body that is 'not too tight and not too loose' when researching movement (Dilley in Caldwell 2024). Guiding invitations include: 'follow kinaesthetic delight', 'continuous present' and 'use everything' (Dilley 2020). A mover can end at anytime they choose. Everyone can be moving in the space at the same time, it is possible to enter and exit the Open Space as often as wished. A gong announces the end when participants return to sitting. In this research project the open space was 40-45 minutes in length.

There are three important points of departure in the practice:

Firstly, It is a shared practice and not a performance.

Secondly, It attunes the body to the intricacies of sensation, affect and movement.

Thirdly, It attunes the mind and 'never-mind' to the play between knowing, not knowing, and 'getting out of the way'.

My particular intervention is focused on the role of Witnessing.

[Excerpts from Contact Quarterly Winter/Spring) 2017 and This Very Moment (Dilley 2020)].

Contemplative Dance Practice

Original Form

1. Introduction

Sitting together in a circle. Share names and then introduce the practice.

2. Sitting Meditation Practice

3. Personal Awareness Practice

Exploring individually how to bring meditation awareness into movement—stretching and moving out into the room. Time for self-care, research, and courting the unexpected. Kinesthetic delight is the touchstone.

4. Open Space

Beginning with a short sit, then people enter the space and exit as they choose. It is an open time, an invitation to host this body-mind moment as a guest and to play with others who also enter. Ending with a short period of sitting meditation.

5. Closing Circle and Conversation/Discussion

There are many variations of the CDP form. Some versions have no discussion before or after, and the lengths of time given for the whole practice vary.

[Excerpted from Barbara's book, This Very Moment]

Five Eye Practices

Closed eyes:
internal seeing; rest; refresh

Peripheral seeing:
soft focus; seeing from
the corner of the eyes

Infant eyes:
seeing before naming

Looking between things:
the space "between";
negative space

Direct looking:
investigate;
study;
absorb