

GM ... you probably know me from earlier in the conference. Peter Wiegold, I'll introduce you. Welcome you. Peter has just arrived, he is in the middle of about four different processes as composer, conductor, workshop leader. Peter, we met about, how many years ago?

PW 9,10, 11, 12?

GM a long time ago, working at Guildhall School of Music, postgraduate course, which Peter was artistic director of. I became really interested in Peter's work. I was brought in to direct music students in something I am still pursuing, which is music-based, group-based theatre. I was privileged to watch a demonstration of what the music students were fantastically good at, which was playing their instruments, but making a piece out of thin air – and, the basis of it, as I believe – it may be actually useful to start this conversation off by explaining something about that mechanism you use, based in big band terminology. How you would coax an unplanned piece of music out of an ensemble of musicians.

PW it is something that I like doing a lot, to find some way of creating a space where musicians, often classical musicians who don't do it, can bring their own ideas into it. Can bring themselves into it. So I suppose what my research is often about is how to create space, how to create a fertile ground within the room, so one or two words dropped into it will release people into doing things. Or one or two bits of stuff dropped into it, a certain riff or a certain trill or a certain tonality will invoke some kind of spirit so that layers will appear around it.

[mic problem]

it is ongoing research about how to get fertile ground, a bit like Rosie was doing there, how to get fertile ground in a rehearsal room, so that people don't think, what am I supposed to be doing they just fall into what works as musicians.

GM do you think that that is to do with, before you introduce a task, or a limit – what we are looking at here is how we each might define the idea of what a group is. So what you are saying is that that receptivity is a pre-requirement for that to work?

PW the groove is the pre-requirement in the sense that I always think you have to – a really good ground in order for things to become fertile. So you need to get a groove. A groove might be a funky groove or it might be an avant-garde groove, but in some senses, it is single, it is one-dimensional, it is a vibe, a vibrational quality. And when the vibe is cooking which is, in jazz is swing or in funk is groovy or in classical music is tight, when it is tight, it moves, and it draws things towards it.



GM is there a requirement for – presumably, a groove, if a groove is a space or a vibrational space, that makes - your authorship happen entirely within that. There is no room for somebody being outside of that groove.

PW Except that you can get outside by going inside, I think.

GM so, just staying with the idea of say, swing. Swing is impossible to notate swing in musical terms, it is sort of lollopy – it is an agreed inaccuracy.

PW it is not an inaccuracy. Because sometimes – you press swing on your computer – and it doesn't really swing. Its felt.

GM its felt. In terms of tempo, in terms of microseconds, it is not rigid.

PW ... quality about it, which is rounded or edgy or rolling forward or pulling back.

GM I was thinking, we had a pre-talk which we then decided to cap, so that we didn't over-prepare. But the word you threw in was to the improvisation I saw was, ok diaphanous. I thought Peter Diaphanous Wiegold, it was great that everything seemed to spring from that word, and the response from the violinist was diaphanous.

PW I suppose it is all to do with spring really, that one thing springs off another, and what our job is, is to create the place

where something is ready to jump, is ready to spring, where it falls into place. I often talk about the fact that you need to invoke it rather than describe it. Because if you describe it, you can describe it for three hours and it won't happen. If you just say the right word, or trigger, if you trigger the right person at the right time they will – spring, leap. Which must be the same as working with actors or –

GM I am wondering to what extent in that way I – it goes slightly into one of your other roles, in that you are, you are conducting things to some extent. Do you think there is just something in the transmission of approval, there is something maybe, if you are the provider of this space in which things become art, that you communicate to your players. I would say we both call the people we work with, 'players'. Do you think, letting them know when they are doing the right thing, is something you need to do or would you think that that is something that can be felt totally within the group.

PW I think in some ways what we are trying to do is so that everything is the right thing. Is to give permission. I know what I consciously do often is encourage extremes, encourage people to be very soft or very hard. Or very vulgar or very gracious. I think I am trying to send signals the whole time, that it is ok, it is ok, and what's more it would be more ok if you went 20 per cent further out towards – those extremes – so I think it is not approval, it is permission, which is different. It is not to do with me liking or disliking, it is to do with me saying this can enter the space, and even more will enter, even better. It is alright to be grumpy, and it is alright to be lethargic, it is alright to be ecstatic.

GM there is something in improvised music that I used to find – it might be a bit unfair – but where there was an epithet - thou shalt not stay in the same thing too long, in case – that you don't inhabit the same thing for long, you are continually moving on to the next thing. I always felt there was a slight against nature element in that. I suppose what I want to bring up now is the idea of repetition, that, I don't know if it is something slightly autistic in me, but I can watch things repeating quite happily and I can happily do repetitive tasks. And maybe they work in different ways, but there is something about – one of the techniques you would use would be doubling. You do a sign and someone would take something and take a musical line, and basically reinforce it, either above or below, in what ever ways appropriate. Immediately there is a kind of simultaneous repetition that reinforces that riff or that particular voice and turns it from something that might be just a skittering single line and into something much more solid. Or there is the simple question of things simply repeating. Is it that a riff is a four bars that is going to go round and round and round like a magic roundabout.

PW there is a kind of alchemy to repetition that as it goes on it boils up other things in the stew. I think if you go through the centre of something, rather than stop it, and push it, it will force the pot to overflow. So to go down into repetition, rather than out –

GM overflow, we talked a little bit about overflow and – we got really excited about the idea – it was about a state of mind, I don't know if it is even a state of mind –

PW a state of reverie

GM a state of reverie

PW where you go into another dimension.

GM and maybe that reverie is about being able to – you can juggle two balls, but as soon as you add a third you are in a state of spillage, something that's overflowing. I detected that just watching Rosie's dancers working, that by giving slightly impossible tasks or by being required to be totally in the moment, and pull something off that is technically very difficult – so there was a kind of – you kind of have empathetic reaction, but there is also chain reaction. There is an idea about leakage, about spillage, but not gushing, not leakage, not drastically –

PW you don't want it to leak because you want it to concentrate, you want the source to concentrate. There is – Pere Norgaard [spelling??] - a Danish composer – has a concept of interference where you have one rhythm, one pulsation interfering with another, which produces a third, so there is no leakage there. There is a concentrating, the source deepening, one vibration, as one groove cooks against another groove and it produces a third. Kind of alchemical thing. But in another way it is also about the tension between improvisation – it could be about the tension between improvisation and form. And form isn't to release improvisation, and improvisation to enrich form, they exist in a constant tension in the four walls of that tension, and by keeping banging their heads against one another then a third thing happens, which is both leakage and not leakage I suppose? But it is some other state.

GM does this imply – this is the thing that, just as we were working before, that one of those – there is a notion that, just in a sort of existential way we as human beings are composing ourselves – that at every moment we are in a state of composition, just as the world around us is making and remaking itself. I have incredible anxiety as an individual about the blank canvas, about attacking the void, and whether it will pull me in, and about the well being dry. And yet I don't worry about there being no weather, I don't wake up in the

morning – funnily enough there are days when I do feel like that, especially in London. It's flat, grey, neutral temperature, no wind. It can be a very monotonous state, but actually it is still weather. It will inevitably flow on into something else. I am just wondering about whether you have any sort of philosophical ideas behind saying well, you can pull material out of – you can pull material out of thin air, who is writing it, where is it coming from. How does that effect your worldview or how does your worldview effect the idea of composition?

PW I think I have turned round from thinking I made things to that I'm discovering things. I love the thing, whoever it was that said it, Henry Moore said that you have a block of stone and find the sculpture within it. I think I have more and more sense that the music is something that I find and listen out for, rather than something I create. It is not coming from a well, it is already there. I am listening out for it.

GM it is quite a mystical view, some might say – not me...

PW there was a wonderful non-mystical example... with Simon Hoggart talking about the Margaret Thatcher sculpture, and he mentioned that thing finding the sculpture within the stone, and he said imagine carving a stone and finding Margaret Thatcher within it. [laughter] I don't know if that was mystical or not.

GM what about taking – if you take a group as being a resonance, what happens when you change that. What is your experience of shifting a parameter of what might constitute a particular fertile group.

PW I think my prime job is to shift the parameters, my prime job is to keep moving the goal posts, so to get a group there and then to do something which changes it from walking to running, or from walking to tripping or from tripping to flying through the air. My friend Peter Enshaw who I used to work with at Guildhall used to talk about the quality of intervention. Which Rosie was just doing in that session then. He was talking about it in an educational context, but it is something to do with watching it, so that at a certain point it does that, that you can do something which maybe pulling the plug on it, or it maybe injecting ... an impulse to it. But there is something about watching it, so that it is either right or maybe it is the opposite, it is about to fall off the cliff. There is some quality of intervention. I feel if you do that right, it can shift the vibrational level from that point in terms of group theatre. There is a point at which it is ready to step up. Or to pull the plug on it so that it falls down. I am fascinated by creative leadership because I am more – I do some stuff as a team member but I do a lot of leading. I think that one of the things I am trying to develop is that point of intervention. Which obviously, it could be awkward – if you do

it at the wrong time, the thing falls apart, and if you do it at the right time, it gains a dimension. It expands a dimension. That is cooking, and the groove is cooking. Perhaps it is also, we were talking about grooves as being some kind of state, that in some way a groove is motion in stillness. It is both still and moving. African musicians talk not about repetition but by being in the same place – so it is often about being in the same place, and perhaps there is something about grooves and music and theatre, that you try and get into the same place and then it is ready to move. It is not restless, it is not anxious, it is just there, ready to move.

GM but I think also, my experience is a need to – to quietly be turning the gas up or – I think another thing is about, there is a sort of binary – you know there is a sort of structure whereby even working in – I am quite interested in things that seem to be in absolute unison, that have this ludicrous authority, like a hand that writes and just carries on writing, but then, even within that imperfections arrive, the memory of what it has just written will effect what it is writing now. You are constantly getting into a dialogue, that you cannot – I keep thinking, of all musical structures and the dramatic situations – that you can have one person on stage, you get a similar, dialogue between what they have just done and what they have done now. And when you talk about falling off a cliff, that feeling of – the sound of the fridge going off, the absence of the fridge. That pulling the rug from under the feet, surprise, change, those shifts of gear reveal creative dialogue between what has happened before. But as soon as you put two people on a stage or you put two musicians together, there's immediately a kind of structural necessity going on, and the thing you might find to contain that will immediately start to produce results.

PW and gear shifts is perhaps what it is about. If you are talking groovy, often shifts in gears more than a 19th C notion of transformation through a narrative. It is more a series of strata that you drop in and out of. I was just thinking of Gil Evans the jazz arranger/composer, he used to talk about 'nudging' his piano playing, he wasn't a big piano soloist but he would nudge at musicians and say how about a bit more of that trill, how about a bit more of those lower notes rather than those higher notes.

GM there's a story about James Brown, he would write a lot, and would build up from that thing, I was thinking about becoming a kind of ferocious, maverick theatre director.

PW with a guitar

GM with a guitar

[end of recording]