

PAULINE OLIVEROS INTERVIEWS DAVID ROSENBLOOM

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PO: This is David Rosenbloom and Pauline Oliveros in Mexico City, December 4, 1978, year of our Lord (laughter).

DR: I noticed in recent articles on archeology they use the term BP now; it stands for before the present.

PO: One of the things that interested me that you were talking about the other day casually was that you had a real change in attitude toward your work in the last couple of years, and that you had to reconcile that or come to terms with it. I'm really interested in what your attitude to your work is and how it has changed.

DR: I guess it's change which has to do/understanding of my own impulses, and I mean rather specifically impulses as initiators for action. I've worked it out or worked through it using the medium of improvisation I suppose more than any other way. And using work with the nervous system as a means of being conscious about some structure that I think of as going on. In working with the neural signals I of course got involved in becoming part of a feedback loop or part of a circuit in which I wasn't necessarily the initiator but a processor. But then that not being the end in itself that I was interested in, I wanted to reach a place where I could maximize the impulses that I felt that naturally came that were specific in focus but not identified in origin, at least at that time that they occurred. It's like when you pick up the phone and you know who's on the other end of it. But those things began to happen, especially in playing, both alone and with other people that gave me a lot of feedback musically. So in working with this piece *On Being Invisible*, the title refers to a kind of cyclical process of being submerged, working on being submerged in what I would perceive as a field or a larger process. And

then not looking for but being acutely prepared for the points in that process in which it was important for me to initiate something. And those points always seemed to be the most effective when they weren't preconceived or prepared for but were surprising, very direct, very specific and just happened. So I began to work on that and what I was--I started using the discipline of preparing myself to play. Like I was saying the other day, approaching starting from the point of waiting until I started by some means other than a willful start, and would therefore be surprised by it. And I always felt that that got me to the, it got me closer to the edge of my imagination in playing and it left me open to more influences that I felt bore a direct relationship to my context. And that context could be a people context or not, depending on the circumstances. I had the image of the bow of the--I guess I mentioned that today--the bow of the boat cutting through the water and everything floating by, and that as I would play this thing was moving forward. It isn't something that I perceived as being high speed although in terms of number of notes and events going by at high speed. But the more I was able to purify that process, the more on the edge of that movement of imagination that I felt I was directly connected to. So it had to do with initiation and it had to do with my relationship to imagination, because it's very easy to deal with your imagination as a kind of thing that you dissociate from almost, as something that goes on and you pull from, well, oh, here's an idea, or here's something, and then you, the objective other, sits there and watches it and then extracts from it. And I was interested in being it. And it seemed to have a lot to do with this understanding of initiation and action.

PO: Can you go back and say, have you always held this attitude in your work?

DR: I think I've always been intuitively working toward it, although I certainly feel like I've come to a means of managing it and a repertoire of techniques

and disciplines to use now that I didn't have before. I suppose that I can't think of a sharp change from one state to another in relationship to it, although the music has certainly made some sharp changes. I think it's different now, and I feel more directly connected to it, I feel it's more purified.

PO: How about your emotional states when you're making music, are you aware of those? Aware of changes?

DR: Yes. I am, but I don't generally experience them in the way that I experience them outside of that context. In other words I'm aware of them again as context maybe. I'm more aware of them before and after than during. But I'm aware of them as a frame or context, and in some pieces--I'm thinking again still about the improvisation medium--but then there are some pieces where I turn my attention to making real clear selections of materials based on that, like that qualities of certain intervals or whatever.

PO: What about a philosophical position? Do you have one and is it a conscious one?

DR: In general it would be something like I don't perceive myself as--I perceive myself as a center, as a concentration, but I don't think of things like origins and thoughts too much or possession of / ^{thoughts} too much. I think of them more like air that we all breathe. I think of the most potent forces in music as being those of attraction and repetition which would mean gravity, love, concentration, all those would be attraction. Repetition would be structure, communication, generation of bases for shared experience. I guess my philosophical position would be clearer in reference to some specific point. I haven't been too concerned about pinning it down because my attention has been more on process.

PO: Maybe a better question would be why do you do what you do?

DR: There are the reasons that I'm aware of would have to do with--I do have an

intense desire to participate in some evolutionary process. Probably everybody has that. In other words I have that consciousness; I don't think of it in the Darwinian sense or the linear getting better and better or whatever sense, but there is an innate drive towards some type of transformation and in that sense the activity of art or the activity of music for me is the most convenient medium with which to use that, do that. So I don't think of it too much as perfecting myself or for a particular point coming up, but more the working out of whatever it is that I come in contact with that creates the dissonance which also creates the energy that I feel.

PO: You mentioned awhile ago that you now have a repertoire of techniques. What do you consider to be the major skills that are important for your work, and how do you acquire those skills?

DR: The most important skills are ones having to do with conscious states. Practice for me is the key to everything, I mean I work out everything that I--my most important tool is the repetition of things. I do that in kind of preparation routines which are mostly kind of personal meditative, also physical approaches to getting myself to that place I was talking about of initiation. And I usually would work from first a process of blanking, a process not of shutting down but of wiping the slate clean, and then one of energizing, which is tuning, which is body tuning, which is mind tuning, perception tuning. I have a, I developed a fairly strong tactile sense that seemed to go with states that are associated with high alpha, for example. It's something I can sort of feel, there's a real physiological counterpart to it actually. And that feeling is something that I don't find too much trouble getting going. It's after practicing, using feedback indicators as a means of starting it, then of learning about it, then it isn't too difficult to recreate. I like to get pretty charged up when I get ready to play. But it's always a charging up, it's not

involved with focus or it's not involved with a particular emotion. Although I feel very good. Those are all internal keys that I turn here or I turn there to get to this place. There are exercises that I do like exercises having to do with breath, exercises having to do with the combinations of many actions, and developing the ability to relegate them to automatic processes like if I'm playing the piano, for example, I may work on the repetition in some complex pattern and at the same time work with singing as a means of breath control. What it does is it allows me to deposit first to make all the physiological processes that I can tune into coherent, and then relegate them to automatic processes. So that might be smoothing the breath, smoothing out the other heart rhythms, etc., the balancing of a muscle. All while engaged in some fairly demanding activity.

There's one piece, one piano piece, that I worked on as a task designed to be one that you couldn't get through without maintaining a sense of the noninitiating yet controlling relationship to physical action. I did it as a, it was a study designed for 2 purposes. One was to see if this activity was indeed associated with, that a type of physical activity like that could be associated with high alpha, and which I found it could. And also it was designed as a piece that could be done by 2 people in which there were very fast alternation at (slapping sound) about like that where each person is playing every other note, so you're alternating at that high speed and seeing if that was an exercise that could be used to develop synchrony. And it works. I guess my exercises are all very personal in a sense. Many of them are internal and they're just involved with a kind of, okay tune up now here we go again, and you put yourself in a certain state. And I've found that I can do it.

PO: Now this is a funny question because your work is created work, but what is the highly significant creative event for you in your work and how do you

produce it?

DR: When I get to that state where that balance of initiation and noninitiation happens, and when I'm able to really purify the energy behind it and drive behind it, that's the significant moment. There are others that are significant, too, like working towards the building of a structure that is based on a really direct feeling of a process of evolution that always has strong emotional counterpart, because I think that the emotions have a lot to do with the stages of the growth of something, the stages of the growth of an organism, an abstract organism. Some of them have the effect of the pulling together and others have the effect of the creation, the states of suspension and so on, and that they're very much a part of all that. And I think of the development of sections of a piece if it's a piece that's to be fairly fixed or a piece that I'm working on for other people, I work on it until I feel that that emotional counterpart and the purity of the degree to which the evolutionary process is articulated is really pure and then I get that. That's also highly creative or a significantly creative point for me. It's necessarily the flash that a lot of people talk about. The flashes are there and they're important and usually have to do with solving a problem or having a sudden insight into the way in which things can fit together. And they're tremendously exciting. But what's really significant for me is when that directness of the internal perception, the process or the state or the form, the evolutionary form, is really purified and you really see it--aha, okay. That's when I really feel terrific. And in the improvisational context that is usually most likely to be effective when I can get to that place. So it's-- that's it, those are the most highly creative ones. And they may involve the organism,^{or}the structure may involve often a thing that's happening with

the group which is also very important to me.

PO: Now you obviously are aware of your attention states as distinguished from the contents of your music. And while you're engaged in music making you're aware of this.

DR: Yes, definitely.

PO: When did you become aware of your attention states?

DR: I guess at that point at which I was able to separate my awareness of it from any judgmental aspect about it. Because I guess as a child there are all the things instilled about "you concentrate on this" (laugh). I was aware at that age of my attention states in terms of, well, I'm concentrating or I'm not concentrating, this is good or bad, or it's going to get me into one or another situation. But at the point which I was able to remove any judgmental aspects, which I don't think really happened until not too long ago. But I think I've reached a point where I was able to do that. Reaching that point had to do with being able to allow the attention states to fluctuate without worrying about its effect. So then it became more meaningful or I was able to make greater degrees of distinction or be able to be more conscious of it. That doesn't necessarily go hand in hand with manipulation, conscious manipulation. Because sometimes it just goes where it goes. I guess that would be the point.

PO: Are you able to carry the attention processes over into other forms or parts of your life?

DR: Yes, to some extent, although I don't work on it as much there as I do in relation to music. I think, though, when there's a problem to be worked out if again I can remove myself from judgmental concerns and analyze it, try to feel connected with it, I often learn the most about what to do. I can very often in situations like that find that my attention has been on something

that I wasn't aware that it was on. Often I find body indicators of that. I find sometimes if I'm not conscious of the fact that I'm putting a great deal of attention on something I store that attention someplace in my body, and it's like--and then I feel it physically. And then I sit down and I think, okay, what was that, what am I storing there. Not in the sense of an anxiety but just in the sense that, well, my attention is on this thing, this idea, but I'm not including it in my current conscious awareness. So then I try to work on it from both the conscious and the physical aspect. I do feel that the body tuning is just as important, very important. It often tells me a great deal.

PO: Many people that I talk to are very unfamiliar with their own attention states. Do you know any people working in the same area?

DR: Mary Ashley would be one for sure. People that are, a number of people that are close to me like Jackie and Mary, they spring to mind immediately. (pause) I'm blanked out...

PO: Most people seem to be still tied up with the content of the work. And you have a kind of opposite approach.

DR: The content tells me more about the attention state, at least the kind of content that I'm looking at. It's hard to describe in any kind of structural terms.

PO: My big question was about whether or not you were aware of your attention processes, which I really don't have to ask.

DR: These states of preparedness to respond in a certain mode as indicated by the coherent brain signals. This kind of continues the large effort between the higher frequencies and makes it more calculating than the lower frequencies, really it's more unconscious as long as you make it very clear that what you're talking about is coherent signals as opposed to simply shocking a filter. They're

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+ voice speeds regularly change - very hard to hear*

related a lot to my own attention because I can tell my mode of reaction to things if I use one of my personal techniques to make a blanking and then don't follow it with an attempt to make/a control of the signal but be aware of what, where on this continuum--and I think it is a continuum as opposed to categories of alpha, beta, theta--where on that continuum I am. That tends to tell me a lot about what my current tuning is. I seem to notice a cyclical pattern there.

PO: I was curious during your performance on Sunday, did you reach any sustained state of theta?

DR: I don't think so, not Sunday.

PO: Have you done so...

DR: Yes.

PO: In interim performances or practices.

DR: Yes, I have. It's always tended to be associated with a quality of very dreamlike situation in which there may be shared dreams/going on which one can become conscious of. And it's very nice, but I think I haven't tended in that direction lately.

PO: Is it characterized by involuntary images?

DR: Yes, it is.

PO: Has it been an experience in the auditory sense?

DR: Yes.

PO: In the somatic sense, body sense?

DR: Yes. It has, in fact, especially with orientation to gravity.

PO: And feeling of levitation?

DR: Feeling of levitation or change of orientation. And definitely both auditory and visual sensation or imagery.

PO: I also wanted to ask you a technical question. You're monitoring from

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DR: I Sunday, I don't always, but I do especially when I'm maybe slightly of electrical situation and because it is, you do get the largest amplitude of alpha there. I find that it's no more difficult to control there than in other locations, except finding where it is hard, harder to control.

PO: Are you monitoring only one hemisphere?

DR: On Sunday I was working right in the center, about one inch above the ilium which is the bottom of the bone in the back, right in the middle. In terms of the bilateral question, I do find significance in the predominance of alpha in those musical situations. And that also has something to do with attention because it relates to the mode of processing.

(side 2)

PO: 1972 when I did my meditation project at CME where we checked everything that had 20 people who worked with me for 9 weeks, 2 hours a day, 5 days a week doing different techniques in sonic meditation. And we tested them all in the beginning, measuring the alpha potential on both hemispheres, giving them tasks which were to block alpha on one side or the other. And we found that most of the people who wanted to do the project were already sort of natural alpha producers, but it would usually show on one, higher on one side than on the other. So there would be, one hemisphere would predominate as alpha-producing hemisphere. But the interesting thing was that through the training--we retested them at the end of the 9 week period, put them through the same test--you would see there tended to be an equal relation, and that the large amplitude of one hemisphere would maybe reduce and the other hemisphere would come up. And of course it was only a sample, but it showed that there's a tendency to that, and that that would be an interesting thing to check.

DR: Was there any common tendency for one side or the other to predominate at the beginning?

PO: No, it was random.

DR: That's interesting.

PO: Some were more on the right and some were more on the left.

DR: You'll see, of course, there are differences in both potentials, too; you've probably seen some of the work on it, depending on the motor processing.

PO: I was interested once, I was trying to do a piece, I wanted to do a drumming piece with my alpha rhythm. I wanted to drum between the hemispheres (laughter).

DR: The paradiddle at the corpus . (laughter)

PO: I never was quite sure whether I was actually doing that or not. It requires a lot of tuning, etc.

DR: Right. I worked a lot with phase synchrony training where the idea is to create in phase wave forms from several different locations. And I found that that has a great effect on the agility of a person being able to willfully move up and down on this smooth frequency continuum. The more in phase the easier it is to change to beta or go down to theta or something like that. Also interpersonally it's very interesting. It's a lot to look at. In the business about evoked responses there's so much detail, there really are about, I'd say, 4 or 5 categories in this time continuum of time after the stimulus and the relationship of the to the higher stages of information processing. That's very interesting. And it seems to me that the discovery of the location happens very early is interesting, but I bet we could find a lot more things like that that would be very interesting. It's almost like it would be able-- you could build a kind of a almost like a tree structure in which certain types of decisions or types of recognitions are to be made first, and then they go on but we don't have too good an idea yet of what that tree might look like. We

might find some surprising things.

PO: I'm sure we would, given you could open up the cultural filter, biases.

DR: This business of the difference detectors that I was using to try to identify important structural landmarks to give the computer an idea of where to look first for responses is one that I find very interesting, but it's--and you can do it on many levels of hierarchy if you think of time structure. But it doesn't, it isn't sensitive to a shift of focus, a perceptual shift of focus from one level of hierarchy to the next. And it would be interesting to find a way to make it say something more about that. It uses a, it's the absolute value of the second derivative of the rectified first derivative of the function, which means that it's sensitive to change, it's most sensitive to the leaving of the state of rest, whether the change is in an upward or downward direction. And it does seem to be correlated with strong evoked responses in any acoustic parameter. And I've made it unidirectional, partly because it seems that neurophysiologists are saying that there are separate channels--like Klein's rain control idea--there are always two channels, one which senses changes in the energy from/sensory system, one senses the change in the positive direction, the other senses it in the negative direction, like grains of a (PO: uh huh, I see) as the model is, push-pull, in that the push-pull balance between the two is what is analyzed in terms of information sent up to some feature detector on a higher level. And it seems to work, but the shift of focus is important, and I find that that's really easy to do, and the degree to which the assumed placement of the difference detector at some level of time structure is the thing that is really culturally conditioned. Like what I was saying about speeds, perception of speeds, I really find to be true. I really don't think of something as being slow or fast anymore. Because there are slow things in it and there are fast things in it and they're all

equally interesting to listen to.

PO: It's relative, your position in your own continuum.

DR: Right. And I first noticed that that's what I was doing when I discovered that the people who reacted negatively to some music I was making at the time, which happened to be this piano piece I explained about with the rapid alteration. The people who reacted negatively to it were the ones who described their listening experience as trying to follow each note, you know like they would do. And those who reacted positively were listening to longer cycles.

PO: So it is a matter of attention, which is appropriate, what is an appropriate mode.

DR: Right. What's the most comfortable place for you to localize yourself and/decide what's fast or slow. I tend to, my playing tends to be pretty fast lately, although sometimes I make big changes in things in terms of density it goes through some large, sometimes very sudden variations, and usually the suddenness is again something that comes from the surprise. But I don't perceive it as fast, and more and more I am being able, I think, to make other people not perceive it as fast, which I find very rewarding.

PO: Do you find that you can transmit your state of consciousness to others?

DR: Yes, I do on occasion. And I try when I'm playing to work on a state where-- to try to really work towards generating a state of shared imagery with the audience and everything so that I am both receptive and transmitting and really work toward levitating the whole group as it were, not physically, but in the sense of getting to communal image making, even though I may be the focus of a certain kind of attention to them as creating a sonic space in which we can all wander, but really working on transmitting it. I've tried some experiments, in fact, both playing and presenting a programmed sonic space in which I would try to present myself as a focus for generating that levitation without doing performing actions, and using the sound as simply a validation

for our being all in the same place at the same time. And therefore not needing to go through any of the explanations of, well why is nothing happening.

PO: I've done some things like, I did a piece in L.A. at the Building and I didn't know what I was going to do next. I had been lying down in a prone position for the piece, it was a lying in state piece with other things happening within. So then I got up, I sat up and I opened my eyes and I looked at everyone, and then I closed my eyes, and I didn't open them for an hour and a half. When I did they were all still there (laughter). Some people were on the floor lying down.

DR: That's fantastic. Do you know Sheila DeBritt at all? She's been very nice to Jackie.

PO: Well, I think we've done it, David.

DR: Okay, I hope you have something useful.

PO: Oh yeah, no, it's wonderful.

DR: Great.

(end of interview)