

DANCE UMBRELLA PRESENTS



My Dance DNA

Wayne McGregor in conversation with Dame Joan Bakewell

November 2017

DJB: Hello, everyone. You're all very welcome here at the Studio Wayne McGregor, an amazing place, a great tribute to its creator, and it's here in Here East, and you, the audience, will be listening to us directly and then asking questions. But this is, of course, also being streamed around the country.

This enterprise is called *My Dance DNA*, and it comes under the umbrella of Dance Umbrella, which as many of you know is a legendary institution, and it's in association with The Space. There are five venues around the UK taking this – Hello to the five venues – and each of the episodes has taken a different choreographer to examine the nature of choreography, what it means, particularly to them, and how their movement and their interpretation of the human body has evolved uniquely. Each one of the five is unique, and Wayne McGregor is the fifth. Here we are, the last of the series, to enjoy his presence. So, ladies and gentleman, Wayne McGregor.

WM: Thank you.

DJB: You probably don't need me to tell you who he is. However, I am going to. He is a CBE, not surprisingly. He's a multi-award winning choreographer and director, and he's renowned because of his innovation, his new eye, his radical redefining of dance and movement; at all times he's moving on, he's restless in spirit, so he's constantly recreating and re-examining.

The latest venture is this amazing studio, quite brilliant, and it opened this year. His company is registered here, although the company 'Wayne McGregor' does tour the planet.

He's been Resident Choreographer with The Royal Ballet since 2006. So, that's just something about the man.

I'm going to put three quick questions to you to get our perspective.

But before we do that we're going to see a compilation of Wayne's work and here it comes.

- Compilation of Wayne McGregor's work -

DJB: That's wonderful, that's wonderful to see. What I would like to have seen, and isn't there, and we're not going to see, is your body in motion. Do you enjoy dancing yourself?

WM: I do, I love being in the studio. I love being in that moment of liveness with other live bodies, yes, absolutely. Once a dancer, always a dancer.

DJB: What is the first dance you remember seeing?

WM: The first dance I think I remember seeing is English country dancing.

DJB: Morris dancing?

WM: No, more maypole dancing, and English country dancing, yes. My primary school, Banks Lane Junior School, in Stockport, they had a big tradition of English country dancing, so I think that was probably the first time I really saw dancing.

DJB: I'm quite jealous, because what you don't know, but you'll know now, is that we both grew up in Stockport. This is probably the only bond we have, because I'm not a physical person. We both grew up in Stockport, and I didn't do any country dancing, I'm jealous. Was it flowers, and...?

WM: Not really flowers, it was like square dances, and working with people. It's really amazing, English Country dancing, because what it teaches you is what the weight of a body is, and what it feels like to actually look at someone in the eye and hold their hands, and pass them; it teaches you spatial logic; it's got amazing spatial gifts, English country dancing, so I'm a big advocate for it.

DJB: Okay, second quick question: what is the first piece of choreography that you remember loving?

WM: Wow, that's harder. I think the first piece of choreography would probably be from a film, but we're going to talk about that in a little minute. I remember seeing Rambert at the Royal Northern College of Music, I was quite old, I was 17, and seeing what I would say was proper choreography. It was incredible seeing that company and the range of that they were doing, the range of dances that they were making, and how I could see dance in a way that I'd never seen it before; I hadn't understood that dance could be those things.

DJB: And what is the first moment when you realised that you were a choreographer yourself?

WM: Well, I'm still waiting for that moment. I don't think you ever feel that you become a choreographer, because I think that one of the great things about art making is that you should be in constant flux – you're kind of lost all the time, the endeavour is to be lost, it's not to know.

The great choreographer, Merce Cunningham, who you know I'm a huge fan of, would always say that it's hard to unlearn, that's the hardest thing – but actually, it's the point of departure for everything. So, I don't think I've ever thought I've become a choreographer, not yet.

DJB: What is interesting, is, of course, you have learned and come a very long way, so I'm going to take you on a journey through that way, because we will learn how you become a choreographer. What was the first dance image that really impressed you?

WM: I grew up in the 1970s in Stockport, we know well, and at that time in the late '70s, when I was about 8 years old, '78, two huge movies came out, both starring the legendary John Travolta: *Grease*, and *Saturday Night Fever* – *Saturday Night Fever* actually was first, and *Grease* came second. And I think that's really the first time where I've looked at something and thought, "Wow, I want to be that cool. I want to express myself with my..." Oh, there we go, I can do that move, I can throw those shapes, where you really feel not only the joy of dance, but also the capacity and the possibility of the body with music. It was just absolutely exhilarating.

DJB: Did you hop around the living room?

WM: I think so, I definitely did. I persuaded my parents – who are here – to go for disco lessons, that's what I wanted to do. My first proper training, if you like, is in disco dance, and that's what I did in 1978.

DJB: Does the Travolta influence live on?

WM: It does, because I did disco, ballroom, and Latin American dancing from the age of 8 to almost 18, and it's really interesting, when you have a grounding in something – and for me it doesn't matter what the technique is – to do with physical thinking, to do with the body, those skills are really transferrable in lots of other domains.

For example, I worked a lot in plays, and when you're working with non-dancers, social dancing or ballroom dancing is a fantastic way to share something really easily with actors that don't normally dance. I found with opera choruses, disco moves are always super useful. There's a sense in which once you learn something in the body, you can share it in a really exciting way.

I was very lucky in that I had this teacher called Margery Barlow, she was a very kind of diaphanous, very tall lady, with incredibly... Are you going to say something?

DJB: She taught me as well.

WM: No way, that is amazing!

DJB: She must have been quite a good deal older.

WM: She was an age, yes...

DJB: We learnt to Victor Silvestre music.

WM: Oh, yes, wow, me too! It didn't change.

DJB: Stockport is an industrial town, and there was a small dance class, and we all went, and I used to take my dancing shoes wrapped up in a piece of brown paper, change when I get there, and listen to Victor Silvestre. Little did I know...

WM: There we go. She was amazing.

DJB: But you must have been a star pupil, were you?

WM: I started not a star pupil, and I worked hard. Having said that, I was teaching in the school by the age of about 11, so I was quite quick. In those days, many of my friends at school wanted to come and learn disco lessons, so Margery Barlow, Miss Barlow, let me have a Saturday class, which is my own class, at 4:00, that my friends came to and I would teach.

I realise now looking back, she provided me with an opportunity, first of all to share, and share the learning. But more than that, she was very unusually against competitions – she did not like ballroom competitions, she didn't like it at all. As a substitute for that, she let me and my partner Samantha, who I remember, make up our own versions of the rumba, or the cha-cha, or the quickstep.

Those variations were things that we might then have taught on a Saturday. So, I realise that was my first opportunity to actually choreograph, to have a go at inventing something from a vernacular that we had learnt.

DJB: That must have been a very powerful influence, because she gave you freedom, but she also gave you discipline.

WM: She did. And it was very disciplined. She gave me a lot of freedom, and all that to do with 'what is the rhythmic sense in a body?' 'How do you organise people over time?' I didn't realise that was what I was doing at the time, but these were amazing learning curves.

DJB: Yes, I'm sure. Let's talk about early influences. We're going to explore one very famous name, and we're going to see some of his work, so tell me about it, who he is.

WM: I was doing social dance in ballroom and Latin American, and I did a lot of musicals, and then I decided that I wanted to go to university to study theatre, and I thought I would be doing much more musical theatre. I arrived at this amazing place called Bretton Hall, which is an incredible facility in the middle of the Yorkshire Sculpture Park. Beautiful building, which is one of those old-fashioned arts colleges where you could experience lots of ways of making things in collaborative ways.

Unfortunately, we're killing off many of these incredible schools. But this school was really phenomenal, it was Bretton, and I did my degree there in Dance. So I did choreography, and I did semiotics, and really interesting things. But at that school I literally didn't know anything about formal compositions. I remember my first composition class, and we had a lecture on canon, which is a form of organising dance in time, and I literally had to put my hand up and say, "I have no idea what a canon is."

But in this conversation, it unfolded, a choreographer whose work I've loved ever since, he's a postmodern American choreographer called Merce Cunningham, and I saw this really strange piece, where I had never realised that bodies 1) could do that; 2) could communicate that; and 3) there was no story. This is a piece called *Rainforest*.

DJB: It's quite remarkable, and it does represent some of his finest work. Let's look at Merce Cunningham's piece called *Rainforest*.

- Footage of *Rainforest* by Merce Cunningham -

DJB: Merce Cunningham there, with his company. Did those dancers learn their skills in classical mode? Because there were some moves that were clearly just classical shapes, weren't they?

WM: What's amazing about dance is, whether they're classical dancers or dancers who do modern dance, they all have various techniques in their body.

DJB: You mean natural techniques?

WM: Some are natural techniques and some are learning techniques, and I think that's the diversity that's really wonderful about auditioning dancers. So often we've got this idea that we're just looking at a ballet dancer, but so often that ballet dancer might have tap inside them, they might have some kind of Bharatanatyam, they might have some somatic techniques. A body is never really one thing; they might have a primary technique, but they're really much more diverse than that.

DJB: You're rather suggesting that we might have these skills without being aware of them until they're opened up by dance, and music, and instruction? Is that right?

WM: I think the body knows a lot, and inherently in each of us there's a dancer, I really do believe that. Part of the aspiration of learning how to dance is how you refine those skills. I didn't really do any formal dance techniques, so I wasn't ballet trained, for example. I have very long limbs, I was interested in the '90s in raves, I was interested in this fracturing of the body, you can see that in my physical signature. And from that, I developed language. But you can imagine, me coming from Stockport, doing ballroom and Latin American, going to university, and the first dance that I saw where somebody said, "These are real masterpieces of work." was this, and "What is that?"

Really great art does provoke questions about what it is that you're seeing. I think really great art allows you to investigate what is the potential in something. These were bodies

that were seemingly not expressing something on an emotional level, necessarily. There's an amazing visual aesthetic to that work, those Andy Warhol pillows and how they float in relationship to bodies. Merce himself doing these peculiar moves. What it taught me was that there really are no rules. So, for however many people tell you that dance should be 'X' – critics mainly – actually, dance really should have no rules, and you should be able to be free and explore in any way you think.

Eventually, if you do that, and you have the confidence to do that, an audience finds that work, you get your own audience.

DJB: What I found most impressive from that, and most unusual, was the ripple of the spine. That's not a classical dance move of any kind, is it? But it's beautiful, and it challenges the human body, and yet it says something beautiful about it.

WM: That's totally true. One of the wonderful things about Merce's technique is that you've got this articulation of the spine and the back. You often have classical legs, but you have these very strange, kind of counterintuitive compositions. Increasingly in his life, he did even more challenging versions of that.

But it's amazing, isn't it, to see a form of virtuosity in the body, which isn't just about turning, or how high you can get your leg – where you actually have to look at a body and realise there's many dimensions to the way in which a body can move. That's really all food for choreographers. The wonderful things about choreographers is you have that diversity. Some people like to locate their work in this area of interest, some like to do it more globally, some like to really reduce what their interest is, but all is possible, and I think that's really extraordinary.

DJB: We're going to see a work of yours that was influenced by Merce Cunningham. But let me ask you first: you get an array of dancers, and you rightly attribute to each of them entirely different skills and capabilities of their body, so to what extent do you have to study your dancers before you even choreograph anything?

WM: I think you definitely do that. Choreography is very much a process of transaction of energy, and so I think it's very much a reciprocal process where you are offering and getting something back; it's a feedback mechanism, it's not a one-direction mechanism. For me, what's really important about working with dancers is that you have to learn how they solve problems with their body. So, you set the body a challenge, and they work out how their body will find a solution to it.

DJB: You don't spell it out in words. You say, "Can you do this? Can you do that?"

WM: Yes, so it might be that, it might be through provocation. It might be through inventing an imaginary space that they can work in, so that you share a space, a territory, with architecture and places that they can work in, or an emotional place. But what's important is

that their voice is imprinted on the things that you make, as well as your voice connecting with them. And I think that, for me, is the joy of making dances in real-time, where you have this live materiality, which is offering you something all the time. They're there not just in the service of you, but also to contribute something of themselves.

DJB: Even as you speak, you're making it more interesting to see your work, and we're going to see some now. We're going to see part of '+/-' tell us about that before we run the clip.

WM: Yes, so +/- *HUMAN* is a piece that I made recently at the Roundhouse, and it's a piece which, for me, is an extension of this Merce piece with those helium balloons, but using artificial intelligence and drones. I wanted to build a drone zoo, and a drone zoo where drones would think choreographically. We've got this amazing practice called Random International, who we've done many projects with.

Really, I was interested to see how those drones could have their own physical choreographic intelligence, and what that would look like with dancers in real-time. So, kind of a whole troupe of dancers, if you like; some flesh and blood, some 'other'.

DJB: Okay, we're going to see that.

- Footage of +/- *HUMAN* by Wayne McGregor -

DJB: That's amazing. What I want to know now is, did you programme the drones?

WM: No, that's an interesting question. They're not programmed at all. What they're doing, they're spotting opportunity, in terms of dancers, and they decide themselves who to gravitate towards or who they're repulsed by. The actual artificial intelligence aspect of that is they're thinking, basically they're autonomous, they do their own thing.

DJB: They've been programmed?

WM: They've been programmed with, an example might be, an algorithm which does flocking, which is a version of birds' flocking. But they're not pre-programmed. So, I didn't say "Those drones move here, move here, move here." They are thinking in real-time, when they see movement, to hijack it and interact with it. And so it's different every night, you never do the same thing twice. They have a total life of their own, and it's complex maths that is allowing them to behave in a choreographic manner.

DJB: And how does that interplay with the dancers themselves? Do they ignore them?

WM: Well, lots of accidents. It depends. Sometimes, if there's a bullying algorithm, where the drones come and bully you... Well, you did it, right? Your shoulder just did that, and so you did – the dancers can't help but be affected by that as a relationship. But I was trying to build an ecosystem in which drones and bodies live together. If one might think about, what

is a speculative future that is not that far off, five, six, years – wouldn't it be interesting if drones and bodies had this kind of correlation where there was autonomy in drones, and what would that mean?

So I was really interested in investigating that space. Ultimately I would love to develop that project with more drones, as many drones as dancers. But you need a huge space to be able to do that.

One of the things we wanted to do with the drones as well, is to make them very poetic. So, rather than having these things that are buzzing and noisy.

DJB: Those are very beautiful.

WM: Yes, they're very beautiful. They have an amazing liquidity, that actually is really analogous with the ways in which we're trying to work with the choreography.

DJB: How do you feel about driverless cars?

WM: I would love a driverless car, I have to say.

DJB: You're going to be programming those very soon.

WM: I think, again, all of these technologies which are using body cognition, or they're using advanced AI to be able to navigate our way around the world, are very close to practices of choreography. I think that's why choreographers and people who are experts in bodies are going to be really important in the future in working with technologists to develop these really interesting tech possibilities.

DJB: Now we're going to take a sidestep, because we're going to talk about *Woolf Works*, and what is extraordinary, of course, is this is a tribute to the work of Virginia Woolf, who wouldn't have known a drone if it had flown straight into her house. Very literary, very verbal, full of metaphor, language, abstraction. I would have thought the last inspiration for a work such of yours, so take me on that journey. How did it happen?

WM: It's interesting: it's partly, she was a rule breaker. She often articulated that she wanted to write in the way in which she would experience music, so she wanted to write as if she were dancing. Just the visual landscape and the poetry in her images are absolutely huge. For me, when you read Woolf, Woolf sits inside you, so it has a kind of kinaesthetic dimension; it has a dimension which is about a physical or visceral relationship to it.

I thought that that would be really amazing food for a potential project, but how do you do that? How is it you might be able to work with that?

I was lucky enough to have a range of amazing collaborators who helped me on that journey, to be able to really explore what Woolf could be onstage.

DJB: Did she ever write about dance? Did she go to dance?

WM: She did, she went to dance a lot. She was very interested in dance. She was very interested in the directness and the immediacy of dance. So, absolutely, that whole Bloomsbury set were very affected by the Ballets Russes, for example, and the innovation in that, and would write after seeing performances. So, for me that was all very connected.

DJB: You took three pieces of work, you took *Mrs Dalloway*, you took *The Waves*...

WM: And *Orlando*.

DJB: And *Orlando*. Very, very different pieces of work, and they get more abstract, and you have to live, as someone watching it, you have to live inside each one of them. And they each have an entirely different character. To what extent did you depend on your dancers to create that?

WM: Totally, always. What's important, the first one, the *Mrs Dalloway* one felt like it was the most narrative – that was a piece that one wanted to explore what the narrative connections were. So, one selects dancers that have that ability to imbue movement with real story, and with real dimension about how it is that you interrelate with someone. So, you want to choose dancers that can do that – some dancers have a natural affinity with being able to do that.

If you think about the history of the Royal Ballet, the repertoire of the Royal Ballet, there are so many amazing opportunity for dancers to live in that zone. So that's one world.

The next one, *Orlando*, I wanted to do a romp, a science fiction romp through 300 years of history, but with lasers, very extreme physicality, with animalistic gesture, with this-

DJB: And one or two collars.

WM: One or two collars, a few little ruffs, yes. But how do you do that, what kind of dancer do you need for that? You need a Natalia Osipova, who has got this amazing physicality – she has no boundaries. And then how is it that you make something that is connected to *The Waves*, which is poetic, is abstract, it's large scale – in that piece, you'll see a little bit now, you'll see a massive film of *The Waves*, and this amazing, emotional music that Max Richter wrote, which starts just as waves lapping in crescendos to this extraordinary, overwhelming force.

How do you sit dance inside that and use that as an expression of looking at age in dance? The amazing ballerina, Alessandra Ferri, in her 50s doing this role, still an incredible artist, and how amazing is it to see that diversity onstage. I think what we're all wanting to do, is to see a range of people and a range of voices on our stages; we want our stages to be reflective of the cities that we live in, or the country that we live in, or the international focus that we might have, we want that. This is a really beautiful example of that.

DJB: Before we come to see an example of that, we're going to see a piece of *Nostalgia for The Light*. This is a very distinguished film, won awards, universal praise, and it has a particular relationship to *The Woolf Works*. So, I think we should watch it first, and then I'd like you to

explain how that happens. Can we see *Nostalgia for the Light*? We'll explain a bit later, because... Just experience it, it's wonderful.

- Footage of *Nostalgia for the light* by Patricio Guzmán –

DJB: That is a remarkable film, and it already explains in itself the relationship between the sky over the desert, and the people relating to the soil of the desert, and indeed the bones of those they love.

So, where did you go when you saw that? It must have made a big impression.

WM: I'm a big lover of documentary films, and often when I'm working on a project, I try and prime myself to look at references that aren't directly linked to or next to, one would seem, the material that I'm working with. What was super interesting about this is, this is a documentary, it's looking at documentary in terms of the Atacama Desert, in terms of astronomy; it's looking at documentary in terms of archaeology and digging up mummies that have been atrophied in the sand – some of the first examples of cancer cells in these mummies.

And at the same time it's telling a human story about Pinochet's political prisoners who had been buried there, and mothers sifting through the sand, looking for bones. There's an amazing analogy between the sea of sand, and looking for this minute thing which might be a bone; and the sea of the skies, and looking for constellations and new stars, and trying to comprehend distance. For me, all of that is related to time, it's related to space, it very much is very Woolfian, I think, in its concepts. For me, it was a really exciting way to deal with, and helped us think about that three act structure, where you could do something which was very abstract, you could do something which was very narrative about human beings, and you could do something which was thematic, all in one really beautiful thing that spoke to one another.

DJB: *Mrs Dalloway* is set in a particular time, almost a date, virtually. Then we've got *Orlando*, which goes through the centuries. And then we've got *The Waves*, which are the timelessness... Did you put those together consciously, or did it only occur to you afterwards that this film that we've just seen had been influential subconsciously?

WM: I think it was subconscious. So many of these things are subconscious. But it really struck me that you could get something like an intimate, personal story, and connect that really immediately with something which is unfathomable, huge. That's one of the wonderful things about dance, that you can work at the micro and the macro level. There's a sense in which you can zoom in and zoom out, I think more than any other art form.

It gave me the confidence to try that, in what had been typically and is often a very formal way of doing story ballets, if you like – a frame which is very fixed. So, I thought it might be a way of shattering that frame, and just taking the risk.

DJB: Well, we have to see *Wolf Works* now, because we've seen the work that relates to it, and now we can belong to it.

- Footage of *Wolf Works* by Wayne McGregor –

DJB: How much of that is free movement? Is that the same every night?

WM: There is no free movement in that.

DJB: None at all? So every dancer is...

WM: Choreographed.

DJB: Is programmed, in collaboration, obviously, you collaborate with her or him, and that is fixed. And their relationships stayed...?

WM: All the compositional aspects are all fixed. I think the way in which dancers dance every night should always be different. When you get great dancers in front of you, what they're doing all the time is making different choices about how they perform the movement. One would expect dancers of that calibre to be recolouring, redrafting, finding something new in that language.

I think there's nothing worse than a dancer repeating the same thing, in the same way, making the same choices. I think dancing is as much a cognitive act as it is a physical act. When it's only in the body, when you only rely on the body and go through the motions of it, you have to really work hard at shifting attention to be able to get more value, more richness. What's phenomenal about those dancers is that they do that.

Just to say, about Alessandra Ferri: Alessandra Ferri had retired from the stage, pretty much, and she was doing a few small projects. I had remembered seeing her in *Romeo and Juliet* in Milan in the '90s, and just being knocked over by the power and the presence and the intimacy of expression. I went to New York to persuade her to be in this new three act ballet that was a bit unclear what it was going to be, and as I say, she hadn't really been dancing at that level for a while.

What was phenomenal about that art is that she just took that risk with both hands – she grasped it, and she said, "I'm absolutely going with it." And it was an amazing process with her, I learnt so much from her. And it was a really incredible joy to see her in the context of the Royal Ballet and dancers there, seeing that dancer in the space. It was a really charged process, it was fantastic.

DJB: You explain how you got Ferri to come and dance, but how do you recruit your dancers? It can't just be the body, then – do you have conversations with them?

WM: You just pay them [laughter]. It's funny, I think dancers find you, I really believe that. I could have an audition with 800 people, but already they find you. There's just something about them in seconds when you see them, that-

DJB: You weigh them up, the body, and what it can do.

WM: I think you expect the body bit. So, you expect that they're going to be very technically proficient, you expect that they're going to look like they really take care of their body, you expect that they're going to be able to do complex coordinations, you expect that they're creatively adaptable – I expect all of that, that's low level. It's the other bit that I'm interested in, it's the other bit you want to see.

I always find it remarkable in auditions how some dancers spend all of the time standing at the bar showing me how flexible they are but not looking at me; and others spend the time just going, "Hello" yet normal, have a normal engagement, and this one is the one you know that you're going to be able to work with over the time, this is the one you know you're going to be able to pull something out of – but this is the one that's found you. Everybody in auditions now is going to be going, "Hi," but that's the one that you...

DJB: Well, it's unique, isn't it?

WM: Yes, it's unique, so I'm super lucky that that happens. Also, I like to try with dancers. I think sometimes the job of a choreographer is to inspire dancers to think for themselves outside of perhaps that other people have put them in. What I try to do when I'm making new work, is have dancers that I know very well and dancers that I don't know at all – this generates a very beautiful kind of alchemy in the body that really teaches me something, and unlocks something in them.

Finally, I'll just say that the creative dimension of dancing is really important for me. If you're not interested in creatively being engaged in a process, if you're not interested in talking to neuroscientists, if you're not interested in talking and understanding maybe what is some of the complex maths in the drones, if you're not interested in thinking about working with a geographer or an anthropologist, just don't come to me. There are other processes that would be more beneficial and interesting to you, but if you want that, if you're hungry for that, which honestly, this curiosity, most dancers have, then this is a good home for you.

DJB: So, where are you going now? What is the latest thing to engage your interest in the greater world out there, what sort of things?

WM: I'm super interested in these new platforms for dance. I'm interested in VR, AR, artificial intelligence, you can see the beginning of that in the drone project. We're interested in developing systems that might generate autonomous choreography that has never been seen from my archive before, I'm interested in that. I'm interested in how one might be able to use kinaesthetic intelligence in other dimensions, in other domains; that might be robotics, what would a robotic dancer look like that could actually dance as if they're improvising, so not pre-programmed – what would that be? What intelligence would we need to be able to allow it to access to make decisions for itself in that way?

DJB: We're going to see a bit of Boston Dynamics right now, and then I want to take you up on that, because it seems to me that the human body is always going to outstrip the mechanical. However, we'll come to it, because we're going to watch this and see the

potential for these robots that they are... Well, make your own decisions about them. Here they come.

- Footage of Boston Dynamics robot-

DJB: Well, it is amazing, but I could do most of that, even if I couldn't get up if I had slipped on a banana skin. So, I can see that there are things that machines can do that I can't. But the human body is more graceful, more attractive. How are you going to use that? What is that saying to you?

WM: First of all, it's saying... As you know, I've got two whippets, so if anybody wants to buy me a birthday present, I'll have two of those. It's saying that what we are starting to understand about biomechanics, about how the body moves, is transferrable into other dimensions, in this case robotics. And so the learning that's in a body, what does the body know, can be adapted in other circumstances.

At the moment, of course, yes, still they're a little bit clumsy. But if you think about it, just the complexity of having robotics move in that way is really phenomenal. It's getting closer and closer. You can see not only what sort of animal motion it's working on, but you can actually also see its potential usefulness, you can see where it's moving.

I just think this is really interesting, this relationship between what the body knows, and how we exorcise that information and give it to things that are inanimate and what that means. That as an intellectual and a future potential is really fascinating. It's interesting then, what are the ethical debates around that? You have to be in the conversation to really have anything to say about their application.

You could look at those and go, "That's amazing, that could help me with my kitchen washing up." You could say, "Oh, those robots could be weaponised and used in warfare in a remote way." Application is the most important thing. We have to be cognizant of the conversation around this, and I think artists have to be at the centre of it, and they have to be driving some of those conversations about, "What does that mean? How does that make us feel? What kind of society is that going to promote?" I think it's really important that artists have a function in that.

That's why I'm excited. I'm excited from a technical point of view, and I'm excited from an ethical point of view.

DJB: From the ethical point of view, there is the danger that you start to think they're real, whatever 'real' means. You start to believe that they are creatures, and they're not machines – but they are machines, put together and programmed by people. The time will come when they start programming each other, and they could perhaps do without us. Does that worry you?

WM: Well, I wouldn't be here to know. It doesn't worry me. I'm interested to see what natural evolution is. I'm interested to see what humans' capacity and capabilities are able to create. I think that we will always have an amazing way of organising and dealing with those kinds

of questions. I think we'll construct the kinds of societies and kinds of relationships that we want using this tech, if we really engaged in the debate.

So, I think we can help construct our future. The future isn't something that is just going to be done to us, and we're just suffering inside it – it's something that we make, it's something that we contribute to, and we have to have the conversation around it.

DJB: It's been wonderful to be in your company, to hear what you have to say. We have to thank Dance Umbrella and the whole project, the *My Dance DNA* project that brought Wayne to us, and us to him, to hear what he had to say. So, thank you particularly to you.

WM: Thank you so much.

**Recorded live on Tuesday 21st November 2017
Studio Wayne McGregor, London, UK.**



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

