

Building Resonance

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Abstract

Building Resonance

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My art practice is greatly influenced by my familial relationships. Using sculpture and performance, the interaction between my work and its audience is essential. As a tributary connects bodies of water, I aim to connect the memories of my late father, and my own past, to the experiences I have with my children. Collecting discarded materials and repurposing them is essential to my practice. I give these materials new life and create experience-based sculptures that carry the viewer into an alternate state. I aim to suspend the viewer between reality and fantasy, the past and present. Offering them a glimpse into my romanticized but perceptive view of the human experience. Finding universal truths through the exploration of my own history, I recall childhood through the lens of a child, and build it through the hands of a father.

Exploring material, sound, and form through object and performance I aim to weave the present and the past. The scope of my practice has predominately been grounded by my connection to my place of origin and fatherhood. My research into origin through my studio practice revealed to me the significance of the degeneration and departure of origin. I am interested in engineered and manufactured building materials such as oriented strand board (OSB) and corn syrup, because of their tangible representation of multiple states of time. Byproducts of industry, their materiality reduced to degenerate versions of their natural form.

Resonance, both in the audible sense as well as an object's ability to evoke memory or understanding guides my explorations. This exploration is dependent upon the interaction of the viewer, and their perception of my work. Employing a variety of resonance chambers that mimic the form of the coffin and the cradle, I am seeking to create a moment of oscillating perceptions. As life and death are in chorus with each other, a beginning and an end, a future and a past, seen for a moment finding resonance with now. The resonance chambers will produce sound, and vibration, offering an invitation for interpretation through their interaction.

Key terms

Resonance

- 1) Intensification and prolongation of sound, especially of a musical tone, produced by sympathetic vibration
- 2) Richness or significance, especially in evoking an association or strong emotion

The American Heritage Dictionary Entry: Resonance. *American Heritage Dictionary Entry: Resonance*. N.p., 2015. Web. 07 June 2016.

Departure of origin

- 1) Entropic relationship between object or experiences, and their ability to resonate with their source
- 2) Taking on a degenerate form

Familial relationships

- 1) Generational and immediate connections of personal lineage such as children, spouse, father, or grandfather

Introduction

My artistic practice consists of sculpture, sound, and performance, and is enlivened by the interaction with an audience. The scope of my practice has predominately been grounded by my connection to my place of origin, the Mackinaw River Valley, and a multigenerational consideration of fatherhood, as a father as well as a son who has lost his father. As a tributary connects bodies of water, I aim to connect the memories of my late father and my own past to the experiences I have with my children. Collecting discarded materials and repurposing them is essential to my practice. I give these materials new life by creating experience-based sculptures that transport the viewer into an alternate state. I aim to suspend the viewer between reality and fantasy, the past and present, to offer them a glimpse of my view of the human experience. Attempting to find universal truths through the exploration of my own history, I delve into personal childhood memories, interpret them through the eyes of my own children, and then build what has been envisioned as the father I have become.

I view my work as compositions. Building upon the compositional and artistic theories of John Cage, and the research of Bernhard Leitner, my inspiration fluctuates between aural and visual aesthetics. Proving these elements do not exist in a vacuum, American composer Frank Zappa would argue, "Music, in performance, is a type of sculpture. The air in the performance space is sculpted into something. This 'molecule-sculpture-over-time' is then 'looked at' by the ears of the listeners--- or a microphone." ("Zappa Program Notes.")



Frank Zappa on The Steve Allen Show

March 14, 1963 (first aired on March 27, 1963) ABC

Channel 5

(Image 1)

Zappa is best known for his virtuoso guitar skills and sensational antics on and off the stage. For this reason he is best known for his personal battle against censorship in the arts. In the picture above, Frank Zappa is explaining to Steve Allen how to play the bicycle. Introducing the piece Zappa tells Allen, "I believe that a lot of the people have actually played bicycles from time to time. When they're young they take a piece of cardboard and a clothes pin, attach it to the rear wheel and when it goes around it makes that noise and you're playing a bicycle." ("Zappa Program Notes.") Zappa was demonstrating how a regular everyday object can be transformed into a vehicle to introduce radical ideas, such as experimental musical composition. Just as a pairing of objects can influence the other's interpretation, it is the spaces in-between categories that drives my interdisciplinary approach to art making.

Familial Relationships

Growing up, I had three grandpas. Grandpa Pete from my mom’s side, Grandpa Orva from my father’s side, and Grandpa Jim from the river. Grandpa Pete was a painter, Grandpa Orva a farmer, and Grandpa Jim had stories. Whenever he had a fire going, I knew I could get a couple stories out of him. He always told me, “there are no lies when a fire’s burning.” He told how he came to have only five fingers and two thumbs, and how he mounted a World War II plane engine onto his johnboat, and flew it up and down the Mackinaw River. My entire life has been founded upon the folklore shared by those around me—experiences gained from those I loved, those that loved me, and those that were connected by something greater.

I told this story in a dark gallery in the basement of the School of Art. As we sat huddled close in the darkness, I passed the fire along so others could tell their story. My story connected to my place of origin, and the countless nights I spent around the fire. While the fire we shared in that dark basement was merely a digital representation, the experience was real.



There are no lies if a fire is burning 2015
I phone 5c, people,
www.youtube.com/watch?v=iz7wtT07roQ,
696,142 views and counting

(Image 2)

Departure of Origin

Everything around us is undergoing degeneration of origin. I am interested in how much degeneration can occur before a complete departure from origin takes place. Corn syrup, for example, is a degenerate version of a kernel of corn—mechanically and chemically degenerated from its original state. With my personal origin rooted in generations of farmers, corn and its products are intricately linked with my familial narrative. In this instance origin is more than memory or location, it is all of the conditions that played a role in its (my) existence. Attempting to connect to the past in the service of the future, the breadth of my thesis work addresses departure from origin and fatherhood.

The re-contextualization of object and material that I employ in my situational performances finds grounding among the work of Alan Kaprow, the father of the happening, Marcel Duchamp's ready-mades, and Joseph Beuys's appropriation and reconceptualization of spirituality, story, and material. Bringing potential meanings and associated meanings into focus, Kaprow speaks of the ready made in *The Education of the Un-Artist Part II*, calling them imitations in that, "the condition "art," assigned to what has not been art, creates a new something that closely fits the old something...more accurately, it has been re-created in thought without performing or making a physical duplicate" (*Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, Kaprow, p110). Exhausting the fertility of objects' inherent meaning and their potential interpretation through pairings and activation has been the prime

objective of the research pursuits in my studio. I explore these cultural and personal associations with objects through their honest use in my work.

Joseph Beuys's spiritual philosophy, which is his work, has significantly influenced my practice. Looking to a contemporary who has pursued similar paths, Matthew Barney has often been mentioned in the same circle. Mark Taylor elaborates the procedural connection stating, "Beuys's fat and Barney's petroleum jelly meet in the liquid gold of honey, which has symbolized spiritual unity since the time of ancient alchemists" (*Barney, Beuys: All in the Present Must Be Transformed*, Taylor, p107). It is not the material alone, but the artists' assignment of the symbolic significance. If Beuys has fat and Barney has petroleum jelly, my current practice is seeping



Degeneration System 2016 (detail)
Corn syrup, wood, time
Durational

(Image 3)

in corn syrup. Herein lies the genealogical connection that proves the roots of my ancestral tree were grafted, intertwined, and born of the same mother as Joseph Beuys.

In my work, corn syrup employs the same spiritual unity present for Beuys and Barney. As the material runs and flows from its original cast form, tangible representations of multiple states of time are revealed. Drawing upon John Cage's beliefs on the role of the artist, "Cage came to believe that it should not be an artist's goal to shape the world around him to his own tastes and desires, but rather, to surrender to the disorder he regarded as the natural state of life." (No Such Thing as Silence, Gann, p210) Considering a casting of corn syrup, the mold reveals evidence of a creator, the cast form (the created), and its departure of origin. At times moving at a geological scale the amber material flows like time endless but finite depending upon the gauge with which you measure it.

Looking at the lineage of corn as an inherent staple of many civilizations for centuries, corn syrup, a derivative of the crop comments on our modern condition. Stripped of any life sustaining qualities, its materiality has been reduced to a degenerate version of its natural form. It is this transformative departure of origin, which entices my interest with the material. In this state it becomes a void, which can only be filled through its observation. Creating degeneration systems, I am allowing the material to undergo a complete departure of origin.

The process of imbedding artifacts within corn syrup, simultaneously preserves and abstracts the object analogously to the embalming process. An action

intended to preserve the essence of a life, which physically and metaphysically still reeks of death. Connecting to my own place of origin, through the processes of embalming creating a literal lens or portal between present and past, to study the objects history through an amber lens. It is both the same object and a new object in



(Images 4,5,6)

Embalming Studies 2016
Corn Syrup, wood, time
Durational

chorus with each other. This paired meaning between object and corn syrup is not a resonating note, but a reverberating echo slowly fading away.

As the amber lens continues to grow, the material qualities of the lens's movement surpasses the object within, reducing it to a mere armature. Considering the changing cast form and my quest for understanding, Kaprow's words on being an artist offers clarity to the materials movement. As Kaprow quotes, "Being an artist is to know oneself, to know oneself is to forget oneself, (which is the image one has of one's "self")". (Allan Kaprow *Art as Life*, Rosenthal, p57) As the resonating quality is that the forms growth is also its death, I wanted to free the cast forms potential for growth in hopes that it will reveal itself.

Resonance

Resonance—both in the audible sense as well as an object’s ability to evoke memory or understanding—guides my exploration. Seeking resonance, I am exploring the ability of materials and objects to transcend multiple states of existing physically while creating their own meanings through the situations that I create for them.

Starving in the Belly of a Whale 2016

My father taught me at a young age how to listen. Amongst the soundscape of life, there are deeper resonating messages waiting to be discovered through interaction. De-constructing an old barn, board by board or scraping the strata of paint from a building’s façade, forges a tangible connection to the processes of life and death. These acts offer potential understanding of the rift between the living and the enduring—that which has been passed on, and that which has been forgotten. My father always reminded me that, “buildings are living.” They too collect memories, moments of time unique to their condition of being, waiting to be heard.

Starving in the belly of a whale (2016), and *Building Resonance Suite (2016)* were born of the desire to telescope the idea of “buildings as living things,” while providing tangible evidence of the idea’s truth. The sound composition in *Starving in the Belly of a Whale* is composed from field recordings of the Ceramics Metal Arts compound at the University of Washington Seattle. Holding a contact microphone upon the building’s walls, fences, and doorways, I recorded the ambient

architectural sounds inherent to their material qualities. The compound's architectural elements serve as resonance chambers—collecting and projecting environmental noises such as traffic, wind, and planes passing overhead, in addition to the creaks and settling of the building itself. While the sounds gathered through this tactile method of capturing the CMA's "life" are dependent upon the physical qualities of the structures and their relationship to the physical qualities of sound, this is still the buildings' passive voice. The truth I sought after was realized by revealing the North Gallery's active voice, its ability to alter and control sound waves. By playing a series of frequencies between 30hz and 60hz in the north gallery, and tuning those frequencies to the resonance of the physical space, the active voice is made audible. With the active and passive voice in harmony with each other the "life" of the CMA is revealed.



(Image 7)

Starving in the Belly of a Whale 2016
Oriented strand board, fabric, sound
Site-specific installation

The visceral qualities of *Starving in the Belly of a Whale* are equally dependent upon the sound composition, and the interface in which the work is presented. The entrance to *Starving in the Belly of a Whale* draws from the same notions of intentionality present in sacred spaces ranging from Mesoamerican temples to contemporary places of worship. The entrance serves as a means to remove the viewer from their everyday, reminding them why they are present. Giving the experience they are about to receive the potential to resonate with their own history.



(Image 8)

Starving in the Belly of a Whale (tunnel entrance) 2016
Oriented strand board, fabric, sound
Site-specific installation

As the viewer crawls through the tunnel, layers of red fabric serve as filters that gradually transition the viewer into the darkness of the space within. Crossing the threshold between the tunnel and the interior space, the darkness is initially overwhelming. As the viewer strains to regain balance within the vast darkness, the sound overtakes their visual sense, giving them reference to the space they now inhabit. As viewers' eyes adjust to the cave-like light, they are able to observe others as they undergo the same transition from misperception to slowly grasping the conditions of the new space they now exist within.



(Image 9)

Starving in the Belly of a Whale (interior) 2016
Oriented strand board, fabric, sound
Site-specific installation

Starving in the Belly of a Whale, has peripheral connections to Joseph Campbell's writings on the so-called "Hero's Journey". The birth of a new self through the death of an old self is evident in storytelling throughout the world from Gilgamesh to Star Wars. The "whale stage" of the fable represents the struggle we must endure to grow. I am interested in appropriating an interrupted stage of this idea. Resembling a skipping record, continually being drawn back to the same moment, addressing my own struggle with addiction and fatherhood. Each of us at some point are starving in the belly of a whale hoping to come out the other side, a better person.

Building Resonance Suite

Considering the reciprocal relationship between audience and the work, the pieces within this suite, become interfaces between the substance of the work and the audience. Reflecting upon the practice of sound artist Bernhard Leitner, LaBelle states, "the boundaries of sound, space, and the body create new architectures, beyond the fabrication of walls or the limits of the skin to find internal zones of resonance,". (*Background Noise: Perspectives on Sound Art*, LaBelle, p174). *Starving in the Belly of a Whale*, gets close to bridging these internal zones with the experience I wanted to create, whereas *Building Resonance (echo)* is a direct artery into the internal zones of resonance, which I seek to open. Leitner's piece *Sound Chair (1975)*, is a direct result of his decades of research between sound, space, and body. As Leitner states, "the physical aspects when sound waves hit us, penetrate us, move within us..." "...Certain frequencies directed at organs have an impact



(Image 10)

Bernhard Leitner 1975
Sound Chair

on them, on their state of tension and their structures.”(LaBelle, p174-175) In this work specific tones, such as the low reverberation of a cello, are played into the human body to explore sounds ability to affect physical systems.

Building Resonance (yellow) 2016



Building Resonance (yellow) 2016

Steel, reclaimed oriented strand
board, wood
3 x 2 x 6 feet

(Image 11)

Building Resonance (yellow) (2016), embodies qualities of calm as well as terror. The concave curve of the bent wood embraces the body, while the tight curve of the metal rockers threatens rebirth from its womb-like embrace. Offering subtle suggestions of both a coffin and a cradle, the sculpture's simplicity allows room for interpretation through the audience's interaction.

Standing on the Moon and Slow Walk 2016



Standing on the Moon 2016
Wood, car tire, field recordings
4 X 6 X 9 feet

(Image 12)

Standing on the Moon considers childlike sensibilities of the form and materiality of everyday objects. I was particularly motivated by how literal I could be in the use of objects, such as an old car tire, and still transform their understanding and interpretation through their use. Building with materials of my

childhood—discarded objects and scraps of OSB (oriented strand board) left over from my father’s construction business—I wondered how I could translate a deeply personal appreciation for a material and if it was necessary for every material consideration to be understood by my audience.

Standing upon the wooden platform at the base of *Standing on the Moon*, the materiality of the tire and the OSB is forgotten. As the sound and vibration felt through the resonance chamber offers a new level of understanding of the work. The circular relationship of life and death are not inherent to the form of *Standing on the Moon*; this quality is introduced through the pairing of the sound composition *Slow Walk* (2016) with *Standing on the Moon*’s form.

At times I look to my surroundings for inspiration. Sitting at the bus stop near my studio, as I regularly do, I noticed a black Camaro speeding down Montlake Avenue in Seattle. As several police vehicles promptly followed, I quickly realized that this was a car chase. After the fifth or sixth police car sped past, I decided to make an audio recording of the chase. The chase continued for several hours, pulling all authorities into action. What started for me as a curiosity in sound suddenly gained gravity through the discovery of the driver’s death. The sounds on the recording are still recognizable elements of everyday life, sirens and traffic, but what had I just witnessed? What had I just recorded? I found myself wondering if I had just made a recording of the drivers last moments on earth. The composition of *Slow Walk*, is comprised of sounds appropriated from recordings of my family, my wife and kids’ daily lives, overlaid with sounds of the desperation of the driver of

that black Camaro. It is this unknown history of object, material, and sound that fuels my studio practice. How much do I need to reveal, and how much can I conceal, and still allow the work to resonate?

Building Resonance (echo) 2016



(Image 13)

Building Resonance (echo) 2016 (still from performance)

Slate shingle from the El Paso Illinois Train Depot, wood, steel, silicone, electronics,
sound of the Train Depot

Installation for performance

The fabrication of *Building Resonance (yellow)* and *Standing on the Moon* greatly informed *Building Resonance (echo)*. I wanted to access the calm terror of *Building Resonance (yellow)*, and the ambiguity of *Standing on the Moon*. As a means of developing a better understanding and relationship to my materials and forms, I find it necessary to build and rebuild, learning from both the successes and the failures. The development of my work is a form of practiced intuition. *Building Resonance (echo)*, employs the interactive qualities of the previous work in this vein, while challenging the notion of what hearing is, through its interaction. According to Cage, "Hearing itself becomes creative. If hearing has, ordinarily, the feeling of being passive and transparent, it is because the genetic factors that give rise to it are obscured. In the moment of the encounter, we can briefly feel these factors trembling at the edge of perception." (*The Process That Is the World Cage/Deleuze/events/performances*, Panzner, p121)

The form of *Building Resonance (echo)* mimics the coffin and the cradle, creating a moment of oscillating perceptions. As life and death are in chorus with each other, a beginning and an end, a future and a past, seen for a moment finding resonance with now. The piece offers an instance for the viewer to believe that they know what they are experiencing, while still leaving them wondering what they just perceived.

The use of resonance chambers as a means of collecting and projecting meaning, finds new insight through Cagean theory, "The Story of the anechoic chamber is a story about Cagean performance - a story about cooperation of the

material and the immaterial, the natural and the technical, and the intentional and the unintentional. It is an unusual approach to performance, one that de-centers the familiar image of agency (human intentions) and affirms something altogether stranger.”(Panzner, p4) By using the sound of the El Paso Train Depot I share the history of this once-abandoned building that underwent a metamorphosis of new life—as a performance and visual art space for six years—only to return back to its previously abandoned state at the trembling edge of perception. The focus is not the building itself, but rather what the building contains within its empty rooms. The death of the idea, has become the birth of its potential, as I cannot share these experiences, I can give these vibrations a platform to be heard.



John Cage 1940
Bacchanale (prepared piano)

Just as *Bacchanale*, performed in Seattle in 1940 was a profound gesture in the scope of Cage's practice and compositions for prepared piano works, the El Paso Train Depot revealed to me a new potential through the arts.

My role as the performer in *Building Resonance (echo)* draws from the Greek legend of Charon, the ferryman between the living world and the dead world. The performance begins as I sit upon a black silicone stump, rubbing a slate shingle. The slow circular rubbing of my hand upon the slate—reminiscent of soothing one of my children back to sleep after being awoken from a bad dream—is translated into a low rumble resounding from the coffin/cradle. This act channels my experiences with my father bestowing the agency of my father within the layers of this brittle shingle. The slate is a conduit between those two worlds, drawing people in, encouraging them to lie upon the rumbling box. As they rest upon the coffin/cradle, feeling the rumbling deep within their bones, I slowly approach them and place the shingle upon their chest. While continuing the circular motions upon the slate, I tell them a story:

I have carried this piece of slate for fifteen years.

This piece of slate came off of a train depot built in the 1800's.

Abandoned in the 1950's as interstates began to spread.

For decades that train depot sat empty.

In the 1990's my father had a midlife crisis of sorts. Instead of buying a corvette he decided to open a community art center in a cornfield in El Paso, Illinois.

Now, El Paso is a small farming town, and in this small farm town if you weren't good at sports or the most beautiful girl in the room you served little purpose to the community.

This piece of slate that protected that train depot for over a hundred years created a safe haven for those from the wrong side of the tracks.

It offered a safe place for someone to paint a picture and have it be seen, to write a song and have it be heard, to write a play and see it performed.

I carry this slate to remember my father.

My father taught me things.

This piece of slate taught me things too.

My father taught me that buildings are living things.

They aren't empty shells. They contain the joy, the sorrow, the love, the hate, the life, the decay.

The history of us.

The history that has been here before us, and will be here after you and I are gone.

I have carried this piece of slate for fifteen years.

I hope this.

Resonates with you.

With much of my practice focusing on trying to preserve and recreate elements of my familial history for my own children, departure from origin is what I feel my work is truly about. By studying material and forms degeneration of origin through degeneration systems and resonance I have demonstrated material and objects ability to transcend multiple states of both existing physically as well as creating their own meanings. Drawing from my deeply personal association with the material within my work, I have gained the most traction in the periphery of what and why I create.

FIN

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"Zappa Program Notes." *Zappa Program Notes*. N.p., 2002. Web. 08 June 2016.
March 14, 1963 (first aired on March 27, 1963) ABC Channel 5.

Annotated Image List

Image 1



Frank Zappa on The Steve Allen Show
March 14, 1963 (first aired on March 27, 1963) ABC Channel 5

"Cycle It out." *Pinterest*. N.p., n.d. Web. 01 June 2016.

Frank Zappa revolutionized the way we consider the musical experience. His legacy is rich with industry breakthroughs from recording and production, to performance.

Image 2



There are no lies if a fire is burning 2015
I phone 5c, people,
www.youtube.com/watch?v=iz7wtT07roQ, 696,142
views and counting

Photo compliments of the artist. Performed at a Per4m 4m performance event at the School of Art at the University of Washington Boulder in January 2016.

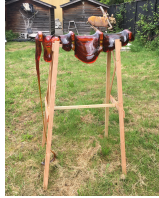
Image 3



Degeneration System 2016 (detail)
Corn syrup, wood, time
Durational

Photo compliments of the artist. *Degeneration System*, explored materials potential to transcend time and state.

Images 4,5,6



Embalming Studies 2016
Corn Syrup, wood, time
Durational

Photos compliments of the artist.

Image 7



Starving in the Belly of a Whale 2016
Oriented strand board, fabric, sound
Site specific installation

Photo compliments of the artist. Exterior photo of *Starving in the Belly of a Whale*.

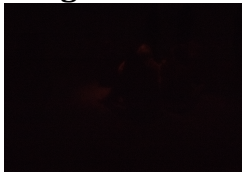
Image 8



Starving in the Belly of a Whale (tunnel) 2016
Oriented strand board, fabric, sound
Site specific installation

Photo compliments of the artist.

Image 9



Starving in the Belly of a Whale (interior) 2016
Oriented strand board, fabric, sound
Site-specific installation

Photo compliments of the artist.

Image 10



Bernhard Leitner
Sound Chair 1975
Wooden chair, loudspeakers

"Gallery of Bernhard Leitner: Sound Spaces - 15." *ArchDaily*. N.p., n.d. Web. 07 June 2016. Leitner's use of sound and it's affect on physical space has been a vital influence to my work.

Image 11



Building Resonance (yellow) 2016
Steel, reclaimed oriented strand board, wood
2 x 3 x 6 feet

Photo Compliments of the artist. The first piece from the Building Resonance Suite.

Image 12



Standing on the Moon 2016
Wood, car tire, field recordings
4 X 6 X 9 feet

Photo compliments of the artist. Built as a response to the instability of *Building Resonance (yellow)* in an attempt that did not require assistance to be experienced.

Image 13



Building Resonance (echo) 2016
(still from performance)
Slate shingle from the El Paso Illinois Train Depot,
wood, steel, silicone, electronics, sound of the Train
Depot
Installation for performance

Photo compliments of the artist. Performed at the Henry Art Gallery.

Image 14



John Cage
Bacchanale (prepared piano) 1940

"John Cage – Bacchanale for Prepared Piano (1940)." *CLASSICAL20COM*. N.p., 08 Sept. 2012. Web. 05 June 2016. *Bacchanale*, was Cage's first composition for prepared piano. Born out of necessity as he wanted a full percussion section and the space for the performance was too small to accommodate the necessary musicians.