

Resonating Eyes
Scott Arford & Randy Yau
En discussion avec Christian Indermuhle et
Thibault Walter¹

The idea is to talk about the process of your work. Could you explain shortly your story of Infrasound?

Scott: I can talk about a little bit about the history of Infrasound which was in 2000. We had a festival at my old warehouse base called 7hz. One of the opening acts had cancelled at the last minute. Randy and I have been discussing a lot about Low Frequency and these ideas and it presented an opportunity. We needed to fill the missing opening slot and we decided to give it a try. So we did. Maybe to this day it stands as one of our most powerful performances.

With no rehearsal... had an idea what we were doing. A first experiment, and it really stands out as something we still try to attain. Some sound pressure levels, some experience of vibration.

It was a good performance. It was very meaningful for us and also for the audience. We shook the whole building which was quite a large warehouse base and everyone inside it. There was a point towards the end of the performance at the position of the mixing desk, where Randy and I were we couldn't breathe: the sound was so intense, it actually became to breath.

Everything was a blur. The eyes were just resonating. No anxiety, no after effects. It was thrilling.

Randy: It was the first time that I experienced that kind of physicality of sound that actually your body starts to lose function. For us, a lot of sound artists would choose death by sound any day.

But it was so intense that we wanted it feel it again immediately and that is what kept us driven to keep doing this.

You were both working with Low Frequencies before, to play together by chance? You never experienced this with your own personal work with Low Frequency?

Scott: Not at all. At least for me Low Frequency was part of the work but it wasn't the focus of the work.

Randy: I don't think we just every entirely just focused on it from a scientific standpoint. There was some pressure, as it was such a last minute performance, we also treated it scientifically, you couldn't develop a really unique score without going completely improv. We wanted to at least have a goal in mind. And we had maybe 24 hours to pull it together. So we really kept it simple and basically that same idea has carried on. Of course after we did that performance

¹ Transcription Sophie Bod.

we started to talk about it more and really develop: what is this about, what are we trying to do here, how do we build a framework, the thinking and the conceptual thought behind why we are doing this. And that is when Scott and I started to.. it was great we were organising many shows together, we were living together and working non-stop and we were writing this manifesto, and we kept bouncing it back and forth.

Scott is an architect with a unique perspective. We brought all those things together and developed this manifesto which to us is still very very relevant, it captures everything we try to do in a short paragraph.

So could you sum up this manifesto? {inaudible}It's not about performance, it's not about music.

Randy: It's truly about that. It is not about music. It's about truly this translation of sound into physical force. And then for us to be able to bring that into an environment where people can have those same realisations. It's both internal and external. Internal meaning you feeling your organs or being hypersensitive to the space between you and I and the air or being uncomfortable or having anxiety around having no control over something effecting your body. Or actually being able to welcome it. Starting to absorb it, welcome it and just go with it.

Externally it is about understanding the space about you.

Scott: There is an architectural element of it. Each performance is in many ways a collaboration with the building, because although our score and our progression and our execution might have certain similarity to one performance to another, it is quite different because it is really about the space. And of course every space will act differently because of its materials, shape, size, different elements within the building, how well or poorly constructed, old or new... every aspect of architecture changes for the performance and how you hear it.

The building also has history, each building and sometimes your performance is creating people talking about each building, something not as closed from the physical aspect of the architecture but more about the story of this building. Maybe sometimes the performance creates these voices and stories?

Scott: I think so. Certainly a performance marks a moment of a building that anyone who is there will remember and probably will think very differently about the building. Generally people are not so aware of architecture and the components of architecture and I think we create a strong awareness of that: of the space – the size and form of the space, the acoustics, also the mechanical systems and other things that might vibrate. I remember a performance in a fairly new classroom in San Luis Obispo. The building was relatively new I believe and it shook like crazy and I think it made people wonder about the quality of the construction.

Randy: That's pretty apparent. The quality of the construction when we perform in a shack versus a concrete structure. Very different.

Scott: Or the performance at the Grey Area had a lot of art type partitions in it and that performance really made people understand the materiality of that. Screws started shaking and things were shaking and suddenly these things that looked like large masses, people actually understood they are just thin pieces of Masonite.

When you say your first performance was the most powerful, is it because now you are also expecting something different from each performance? Was it because that particular day, the aftermath – lot of people were talking about it in a way that was more satisfying for you? Or was it just the physical aspect of it that you never experienced that before? And all of a sudden you said ‘wow’, it is something we want to go through again or deepen? What was it exactly?

Randy: I think it was all the above. For us it was definitely the first was physical - our own body. Not in any rock or noise concert we had ever been in had we experienced that pressure level. The closest would be standing in front of some industrial unit or a jet. Something much more industrial. That physicality was really intense.

Scott: That feeling of understanding the space of your lungs was remarkable.

As to your question: we had different reactions to projects and performances, some better, some worse, but what really drove us is that physical experience, and some of those moments when we couldn't really believe that sound was actually doing this, making our bodies feeling this way.

Are you expecting a specific experience? Or do you discover the building when you are rehearsing or playing?

Randy: I think there is some expectation now. There are things we discovered in doing this over 30 times now that there are certain phenomena we are trying to recreate. So there is an expectation there. But that phenomena is completely different dependent on the space. And sometimes we can capture it, and sometimes we can't. If we perform in a wooden building versus a concrete building versus a glass building it's going to be very very different. But this is what keeps the project exciting for us. Especially as Scott is a professional architect, materiality really defines the experience of a space and it really defines the experience of our performances.

When you are talking about sound, it is always in the sense of a transformation of a physical force. There is other dimension of the sound, that transmission or other kind of experience with sound. If you insist on the vibration, is behind this way of seeing the world, or the universe, the laws behind everything, like everything is connected? Is there a sort of connection between all the materials and bodies?

Randy: Absolutely, we think so. We've talked about it a lot, and it brings more questions than answers but for us when you feel that sound and the air between you and myself, it just thickens and we are completely connected, you understand that everything is vibrating, vibrating in unison on some level. Matter is always moving. It activates that and you feel it, which is pretty intense. We don't know scientifically the answer behind that, or mythologically...

Scott: For me the idea of connectedness of 'we live in this giant bowl of soup media' that we are moving through and it moves through our bodies. Our bodies are not just discrete objects independent of each other, there is a connective fluid in us, between us, through us and I think having this kind of experience of vibration being activated by soundwaves having the space activated by soundwaves, for me philosophically at least for me I start to understand that there is more to our existence than just discrete bodies operating independently.

Randy: We did choose to include a quote from Zbigniew Karkowski in our Manifesto which is very simple: 'All our life is a cycle, all that exists is vibration'. When I first read that I thought 'yeah, of course it is'. But then for you to actually feel it and realise it on your own changes everything.

Yes, it's another level of experience.

Scott: To maybe add one bit. It is very important to this project: we've talked about it a lot and have written about it, and we certainly have lot of ideas and philosophies behind it but what is great about it is that it ultimately comes down to a very experiential thing. When we do a performance, everyone in the audience has a very intuitive experience, because we all understand it, it effects, it connects to the body which we are all very aware of. So it doesn't require a high level philosophical thought to actually understand this piece. That is one of the strength of it.

Direct experience, without mediation. When you are experiencing Infrasound... I have experienced this two times. The thoughts are cut. All the voices are coming. It's something like bypassing the thought.

Scott: It's not an anti-intellectual argument by any means. But it is one that recognises that the body tells you as much about the world, it tells us everything about the world really.