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rePhase

Project Description

Overview

rePhase is an interactive audio installation that repurposes abandoned stereo components into an immersive participatory musical experience. Comprised of structural and audio components rescued from junk shops, thrift stores, and surplus dealers, rePhase gives abandoned objects an opportunity for a second life.

The Installation

When a participant enters the installation space, they are confronted with a black iron framework, welded out of scrap metal, to which a number of speakers are affixed. As the participant draws closer to the framework, it becomes evident that the only thing supporting each speaker is its own driver magnet, which is stuck to the metal sculpture. Participants are invited to re-arrange the position of the speakers in the space. Altering their physical relationship alters their acoustic relationship, allowing the interactor to re-configure their experience of the audio composition via their interaction. At the base of the iron sculpture a collection of rescued amplifiers and other stereo components hums away, awaiting participant interaction.

The Composition

This piece remediates the idea of phase patterns explored by Steve Reich during his original experimentation with tape loops of different lengths. Reich's tape loops were an early exploration into emergent audio patterns created by subjecting sound to repetitive mechanical processes. In this composition, I substitute digital samples and midi-sequencing for looped tapes, but I use the same theoretical approach as the jumping off point for the discovery of emergent musical moments. These "happy accidents" are the seeds for the final composition. In a digital medium it is possible to extend, extract, repeat, and recontextualize emergent musical moments that were elusive and problematic when Reich was first experimenting with phase patterns. This allows me to explore the intersection between the generative potential of this style of looping and the intentional process of composing a determinate piece of music. While rooted in the idea of phase patterns, rePhase also owes much of its aesthetic to the mathematical and repetitive work of Phillip Glass, and the culture of electronic music and re-mix that characterizes many current experiments with New Music. In rePhase each speaker (or cluster of speakers) plays a different element of a modular composition created specifically for this installation using loops, phase patterns, and polyrhythmic structures to create a shifting audio environment in which the participant may become immersed.

The Design Process

The creation of the rePhase installation embraces a philosophy of sustainability and thrift. I am exercising a strict \$5 limit on the cost of any of the sculptural and audio components in order to limit its composition to only those items who are at the end of their lifecycle and have been “written off” or declared to no longer have a value. I intend for the visual aesthetic of the piece to be governed by the particular form of the available materials, with magnetic properties and price being my primary selection criteria. Likewise with the audio aesthetic; the utility of a piece of stereo equipment will be evaluated in terms of minimum functionality and price, rather than acoustic fidelity. In selecting objects for rePhase, preference will be given to those with a palimpsest of a previous life evident in their appearance in order to preserve the continuity of the object’s lifeline. The audio elements will also reflect this sensibility. Old and abandoned instruments, found percussion, obtainium, and re-mediated environmental sounds are all part of the acoustic palette for rePhase.