

Salvage (Guiyu Blues)
For seven performers reanimating dead circuitry
(2008)
Nicolas Collins

Program Note

In *Salvage*, seven performers attempt to re-animate deceased and discarded electronic circuitry: cell phones, computer motherboards, fax machines, sound mixers, musical keyboards, etc. Six of the players use test probes to make connections between a simple circuit of my design and the electronic corpse; feedback between my circuit and the components on the dead board produce complex patterns of oscillation, that are always changing in response to the slightest movement of the probes. The seventh performer “conducts” the performance by periodically signaling the players to try to freeze the current sound texture by holding their probes as still as possible.

Technical Setup

Salvage requires a stereo or (preferably) four-channel sound system, with subwoofers if possible, and a video camera and projector to display a close-up view of the circuit board being reanimated. The duration is 8-12 minutes. Set-up time is about 10 minutes, rehearsal 10 minutes. The performers need no traditional musical or electronic skills.

The control circuit has separate outputs for four channel and stereo sound systems, and should be wired accordingly. It should be placed in the center of a small table, so that it can be reached from all four sides. 12 test probes (two for each performer) are connected to banana jacks on the control circuit, and fanned out across the tabletop (see figure 1).

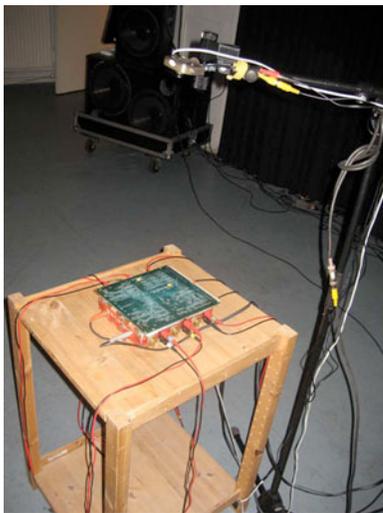


Figure 1: plinth & overhead camera.



Figure 2: video projection.

The circuit to be re-animated can be almost anything: a computer motherboard; a circuit board from a fax machine, TV, CD or DVD player, audio mixer, radio, cell phone, etc. (although larger circuit boards are easier to play). This circuit must be left unconnected to any source of power (batteries or AC).

A video camera should be mounted above the table, focused on the dead circuit, and connected to a projection screen or large monitor (see figures 1 and 2). A high-intensity flashlight (provided) is attached to the camera to illuminate the circuit; this light is on by default during the performance, and is periodically turned off (using a remote control) by the conductor to cue the performers.

The performance starts with the probe-players off-stage (they may sit in the audience, for example). The conductor should be seated to the side of the stage, or somewhere in the audience area, visible to the performers from their off-stage positions, but not a focus of audience attention.

Performance Instructions

The conductor uses hand signals to call the performers to the stage one at a time (i.e., holding up one finger for player one, two for player two, etc.), every 30-60 seconds, until all six are present (see figure 3). On reaching the table, each performer picks up a pair of probes, touches them to traces on the dead circuit board, and searches for contact points that elicit interesting sounds. As the number of players and probes increases it becomes ever more difficult for any individual to exert direct control over the sound.

Once all six performers are present the conductor should periodically attempt to “freeze” and sustain interesting sound textures by turning off the flashlight with the remote control: this is the cue to the players to stop moving their probes, and hold them as still as possible, in contact with the board, until the light goes back on. Each freeze should be sustained for 10-30 seconds.

To end the piece, mute the sound at the mixer (no fade out) or shut off power to the circuit (this can be done with the same remote that is used to control the flashlight). The duration should be between 8 – 12 minutes.



Figure 3: performance.