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LEONARDO ABSTRACT SERVICES (LABS) 2008-2009

OUT OF ORDER: EXPLORATIONS IN DIGITAL MATERIALITY

By Susan Ballard

Digital art installation is the result of informatic materials entering gallery spaces and challenging the establishment of media forms. This thesis contends that the open, recursive and recombinatory process of looking at digital installation is, in fact, the result of noisy relations between information and the spatial temporal contexts of the art gallery. In order to focus on the processes of informatic materials within gallery spaces, this thesis identifies four key modulations of noise and materiality – emergence, feedback, entropy and delay. I demonstrate how these impact on a range of recent digital installations by Australian and New Zealand artists. The lens of digital materiality shifts from an informational context into that of art history where it is found to highlight the systemic relationality of the installation. The thesis opens with a consideration of histories of media-specificity, and argues for a necessary separation of our concepts of media and materiality. This context provides a set of tools by which the remainder of the thesis investigates a range of digital material flows that are not tied to fixed media definitions. I draw on a range of theorists including Umberto Eco, Gilles Deleuze, Claude Shannon and Jack Burnham to further locate these material flows within two strands: experimental sound and information theory. This discussion forms the basis of the thesis' re-appraisal of media distinctions and highlights the complex relationship of informational materials to both sonic and visual histories. The second half of the thesis undertakes an appraisal of emergence, feedback, entropy and delay in specific works and suggests dimensionality, movement and duration as key determinants of the digital installation. These chapters demonstrate that what is at stake in digital installation is the viewer's implicit role in the shifting relationships of digital materiality. Overall, this thesis presents a framework for emergent materiality in digital installation. I develop a theory of emergent materiality as a process specific to digital installation, and argue that digital installation is in fact a subject-forming assemblage of information-noise in which relations of dimensionality, movement and duration coalesce without cohering. And, within which gallery spaces begin to get noisy.

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