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**LEONARDO ABSTRACT SERVICES (LABS) 2008-2009
THE EAR OF THE BEHOLDER: ECOLOGY, EMBODIMENT
AND COMPLEXITY IN SOUND INSTALLATION**

By Tom Davis

This thesis presents a body of practice and theory based work based on a study of an application of models from Complexity Theory to music creation. It focuses on implementations of Artificial Life techniques to explore the notion of emergence as a musical process. Within this discussion it identifies two important issues that are subsequently explored through the creation of sound installations.

Firstly, there are issues pertaining to the employment of models from the field of Complexity Theory to the creation of music with the main concerns being the transference of models and metaphors from one field of practice to another: issues I suggest can be sidestepped by a regrounding of referents in the specificity of music.

Secondly, through a discussion of process-based approaches to composition it identifies a need to employ generative techniques that are more open in their nature, on both a structural and an interpretive level.

This thesis proposes a conception of process that is open in an ecological sense, such that all elements involved in the creation of the musicking event are acknowledged as active components. It recognises that a level of agency can be prescribed to all these elements: the technological agents that construct the installations, their environmental context and the human interactants within this context. The text presents strategies that were developed through the process of creative practice, for the formation and perception of complexity, that exploit notions of embodiment within installation design. It describes a body of sound installations created by the author, and a number of works by other artists, that exploit a concept of emergent musical structures as a process of timely perception rather than fixed objects of empirical observation. The discussion culminates in the belief that in such a conception of active content creation and active perception, aesthetic meaning comes forth not through the transitivity of the object but through the process of conjoined action between agents, the environment and the human interactant. This thesis thus formulates an understanding of an encounter with sound installations as a situated and timely act that is best comprehended from an embodied, ecological perspective, developing a conception of engagement that is contingent on space, place and personal subjective experience.

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