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Negotiating Visitors' Presence and Engagement in Immersive, Hypermediated Art Experiences: Towards a visitor-centered phenomenology at the Nxt Museum, Amsterdam

Loh, Anna

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**Negotiating Visitors' Presence and Engagement in
Immersive, Hypermediated Art Experiences:
Towards a visitor-centered phenomenology at the Nxt Museum, Amsterdam**

MA Thesis

Anna Loh

Supervisor: Dr. K. Fedorova

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Abstract

This study reconfigures museum visitors' art experience in the digital age through a transdisciplinary analysis based on digital ethnography, media phenomenology, and affect theory. Through interviewing visitors of the Nxt Museum, Amsterdam, this thesis investigates the ways in which persons engage with and are present in front of the hypermediated installation art in the exhibition *Unidentified Fluid Other* (June 2022–September 2023). The immersive and spatial qualities of the installations retain an enticing quality that are a popular photographic motif for visitors and designate the institution as a heterotopic environment. Moreover, the installations possess an alluring aesthetics of hypermediation that provokes profound, embodied and affective sensations in their viewers. Instagram usage and smartphone photography hereby significantly reshape and restructure visitors' attention and behavior in the gallery space, resulting in a remediation of their embodied experiences via the hand-held device that oscillates between a desire for immediacy and profuse hypermediation. In renegotiating their sense of presence and sense of selves in the art experience, visitors resort to a dual engagement with the installations whereby they actively experience the art with and without their phones. This research therefore identifies smartphone photography as an additional trajectory in the contemporary museum experience, as an extension of the visitors' selves. The effects of smartphone remediation on embodied affectivity and presence of visitors in art spaces thus retain beneficial qualities which may inform cultural institutions and art historical research at large.

Keywords: smartphone remediation, new media art installation, digital ethnography, museum visitor experience, affective presence

Dedication

I dedicate this work to my great aunt Inge, who tirelessly supported and shared my passion for the arts with me. Your kind, grounded spirit, your generosity, and your keen intelligence will never be forgotten.

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I would like to express my sincere gratitude to everyone who helped and supported me throughout this process. First and foremost I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Ksenia Fedorova, for guiding me throughout the research, writing and editing stages. My gratitude also extends to my employers and colleagues at Leiden University and Art Fix, whose patience, kindness and encouragement allowed me to dedicate the time and diligence this project deserved. I want to thank all of the participants that volunteered for my research. Your contributions have proven invaluable, and form the very foundation upon which this thesis is built. I am truly grateful for your insightfulness, and willingness to open up to a stranger. Talking with you and exchanging our thoughts on art, museums, and your experiences was undoubtedly the highlight of this process. It is wonderful to see that so many people share my passion for art, and it is an ongoing source of inspiration. Without you, this project would not have been possible. I would also like to express my gratitude to Merel van Helsdingen for your time, enthusiasm and interest in my research. Lastly, I am eternally grateful to my family, partner and friends, whose optimism, reassurance and comfort spurred me on during the past few months.

Table of Contents

I. Introduction.....	5
II. Defining the Contemporary Digital Experiential Realm.....	13
i. Departing from (Art) Experience.....	13
ii. The Allure of Immersive Art Installations at the Nxt Museum.....	17
iii. The Phenomenology and Affect of the Nxt Experience: Embodiment and Its Dissolution.....	24
III. Through The Looking Glass: Experiencing Art Through the Smartphone.....	30
i. The Principles of (Re)Mediation.....	30
ii. Extending the Self: The Immediacy of the Smartphone.....	34
IV. Negotiating Presence in Digitally Mediated Art Experiences at The Nxt Museum.....	41
i. ‘Letting Yourself Go:’ Being Present in the Art Experience.....	42
ii. The Dual Presence of Visitors at the Nxt Museum.....	48
V. Limitations and Reflections on Methodology.....	55
VI. Conclusion.....	59
VII. Images.....	62
VIII. Image References.....	81
IX. Bibliography.....	82

I. Introduction

You lift the heavy curtain, ducking your head to take one step into the space behind it. You look up, dazzled, breath catching in your throat. You have entered an empty space, flooded with vibrant light projections, morphing continuously to form circular and geometrical patterns that grow until they collapse and coalesce into the next. As you step further into the gallery, goosebumps form on your arms. You're looking around you, trying to take it all in. You lift a hand to see the projections continuing their motion seamlessly on your skin, your fingers becoming hardly discernible from their background. From your pocket, you retrieve your phone, which you had felt buzzing earlier. The screen illuminates your face. You ignore the impulse to check the notification and swipe with the tip of your finger across the cool glass to enable the camera function. You raise your arms, phone cradled between your hands, such that the lens is hovering just above your line of sight and spin to capture the mesmerizing beauty that is continuously unfolding around you. The shutter is noiseless but definite: the moment has been frozen in time.¹

In the digital age, cultural experiences and the visual arts have become popular subjects of increasingly ubiquitous smartphone-photography practices, editing, and sharing on social media apps such as Instagram. Hereby wholly immersive installation art is a particularly coveted motif for self-representational photography.² A collective desire for novelty in the contemporary attention economy has shifted new media installation art with multisensory features such as light projections, movement, sound, and vibration into the center of the public eye, exhibited in the popularity of the exhibition *UFO – Untitled Fluid Other* at the Nxt Museum in Amsterdam.³ Since its opening in 2020, the Nxt has amassed significant attention on Instagram, visible in the approximately 13,600 posts marked with the corresponding geotag (fig. 1). The spectacularity of the immersive new media installations shown here dismantle the primacy of vision in art

¹ Vignette detailing an impression of the artwork *Foreign Nature* by Julius Horthuis at the Nxt Museum, Amsterdam. Written by the author.

² See also Loh (2020).

³ *UFO* constitutes the second exhibition on show at the Nxt, inaugurated in 2022 and on show until September 2023. The museum is the first Dutch institution dedicated entirely to digital art.

experience through demanding the human sensory gamut in its entirety, and concurrently retain an aesthetic and spatial allure for a generation of digital natives that has yet to be explored extensively in academic research.

The considerable extent of visitor-generated content of the museum on social media implies a continuous mediation within the museum space not only through the inherently mediated, technological environments posed by the exhibited artworks but also by the digital photography practices that seem to organically accompany them. The artworks are experiential playgrounds, comparable even to techno raves, with a myriad of stimuli continuously impinging upon visitors, as can be seen in the interactive personae of vibrant comic book worlds in Oceanworld's *nu radio World Tour* (fig. 2), or the colorful, geometrical light projections of Julius Horsthuis' *Foreign Nature* (fig. 3). Their unique aesthetics of hypermediation constitute an entirely new way of experiencing art, not in the least due to the continuous stream of picture-taking they necessitate. The unparalleled phenomenon of digital remediation occurring within complex and intricate art spaces such as the Nxt, and the ways in which it may reorganize museum visitors' engagement and presence in art experience, warrants closer examination.

Previous research has shown that self-representational photography practices within art spaces allow visitors to form new connections with art objects, create personal digital archives, share their visit with peers, and ultimately extend their art experience beyond the spatiotemporal bounds of the museum.⁴ The value of picture-taking practices in the museum notwithstanding, it stands to reason that such processes significantly redirect and restructure users' attention and behavior in museum spaces, which in turn impacts their reception of and presence in front of the artworks in question.⁵ The potential for distraction encapsulated in handheld devices such as smartphones, and the connectivity and access to a continuous stream of information they grant their users, has made them an object of controversy in cultural institutions that compete for consumers' concentration in this attention economy.⁶ It is particularly in the art world where digital media seemingly poses a threat to an intuitive and unmediated experience of cultural heritage.

The continuous sensory stimuli emitted by new media installations as seen in the Nxt are particularly effective in eliciting profound, affective art encounters that foreground embodied

⁴ See also Loh (2020).

⁵ See also Budge (2017), and Budge and Burness (2018).

⁶ See also Barasch et al. (2016; 2018), and Marwick (2015).

experience over intellectual stimulation.⁷ Recent studies on embodiment in technologically mediated spaces highlight the aesthetic allure of interactivity and augmentation, as well as the possibilities of multisensory artworks to create illusory spaces.⁸ While sharp observations of the *Zeitgeist* of our digital age, such frameworks may fall short in circumscribing the specificity and subjectivity of embodied experience in the cultural field and the rapid evolution of various media, particularly smart devices, that accompany daily life. In sketching a scholarly interpretation of new media installation art and its entanglement with handheld mobile devices and self-representational photography, we may turn from new media theory to theoretical frameworks of phenomenology and affect theory instead. The ontological approaches posed by phenomenology as the study of the experiential realm, and affect theory as imminent embodied sensation that transcends cognition and language, offer a means to understand what art *does* to its contemplator beyond signification and representation of art: at the level of the body.

Embodied art experience as conceptualized here, seems to imply a sense of focused attention or full awareness in an affective (art) encounter; a simultaneous presence of a person's body and mind.⁹ In other words: a sense of presence and mindfulness of the moment in which we find ourselves. The notion of being present and aware in a given moment or experience is becoming a collective core value in a society marked by hypermediated environments.¹⁰ To be fully present is increasingly equated with near-total disconnection from technological devices that might be a distraction.¹¹ Such admirable endeavors, however, starkly contrast the lived practices of contemporary culture that now permanently include smartphone photography, as evidenced in the multisensorial new media artworks at the Nxt. It thus comes to question the ways in which smartphone usage in formerly phone-free spaces such as museums, paired with the inherently technologically mediated environment of the new media art installations at the Nxt, come to reshape visitors' engagement with and state of presence in front of artworks. In a world in which the digital remediation of art spaces is becoming ever more present, the central

⁷ See also Vékony (2017) and O'Sullivan (2001)..

⁸ See also Steinkamp (2001).

⁹ See also O'Sullivan (2001) and Hofmann and Zorić (2017).

¹⁰ This statement is based on the majority of participants' answers, who believed that being "fully present" meant total disconnection from new media and your phone. Additionally, Bolter and Grusin (1999) infer that the increasingly technologically mediated environments of contemporary society concurrently increase the desire for unmediated experiences (9). This phenomenon is further elaborated on in chapter III.i.

¹¹ See also Levine, Waite and Bowman (2012) for a more in-depth account of mobile phone usage's potential distraction.

query guiding the following study is: how is the presence of persons experiencing new media art at the Nxt renegotiated in light of the ubiquity of smartphone photography?

Academic studies of art experiences in the age of digital media, as well as smartphone remediation *in* art experiences, are scarce in the humanities. This is subject mainly to (social) representationalist, and epistemological paradigms, wherein art historical research in particular foregrounds the political, social, and aesthetic conditions of an artwork, over what it *does* to persons on an embodied and emotional level.¹² Nevertheless, a row of studies is dedicated to the investigation of embodied experience through a deconstructionist and material/spatial analysis of new media artworks themselves.¹³ Further research on new media and embodiment treats the matter more generally, from highly philosophical perspectives, which offer valuable frameworks for understanding digital culture, yet are not grounded in *lived*, subjective experience.¹⁴ Additionally such studies do not account for the prominence of social media and digital photography practices in museum spaces. Existing explorations of the conventions and features of the social media app Instagram allow us to understand the value of social media photography in society at large, but fall short in describing how such behaviors and practices may affect cultural experiences.¹⁵ Studies on social media use in the museum space do not consider the art museum specifically, yet do confirm the importance of such behaviors in foregrounding the visitors' agency and authority in the museum.¹⁶ The phenomenon of presence and the importance of embodiment in relation to social media practices in digitally immersive artworks, however, have yet to be explored further in academic research. This thesis, therefore, sets out to further investigate this phenomenon and its entanglement within the cultural field by taking a transdisciplinary, ethnographic approach that may aid in creating a truly visitor-centered understanding of the effects of new media installation art on its viewers, and how they negotiate their embodied sensations, emotional resonance, and presence therein.

The primary case study hereby is the exhibition *UFO – Unidentified Fluid Other* (henceforth referred to as *UFO*) at the Nxt Museum, Amsterdam. *UFO* displays eight new media artworks that investigate the merging of digital and virtual worlds and the ways in which the

¹² Think of, for instance, Erwin Panofsky's three-tiered approach of perception, iconography and iconology to the interpretation of art, which remains a common practice in art historical writing (Vékony, 58).

¹³ See also Pan (2021), and Hua (2021).

¹⁴ See also Hansen (2004), and Munster (2006).

¹⁵ See also Manovich (2017), and Leaver, Highfield and Abidin (2016).

¹⁶ See also Weilenmann, Hillman and Jungselius (2013) and Budge and Burness (2018).

human subject traverses the crumbling boundaries between these spheres, thereby morphing into a fluid, othered being. The complex, conceptual, and aesthetic interrogation of what it means to exist in a technologically mediated world guiding this exhibition parallels the phenomena examined in this study. In remapping the art experience in the digital age, I therefore consider various factors such as aesthetics, lived experience, and meaning-making in the Nxt from the perspective of the visitor. This will benefit cultural institutions, artists, and curators alike in understanding visitors' perception and presence in the cultural realm. More concisely, this research offers an alternative definition of the contemporary art experience through an aesthetics and phenomenology of hypermediation.

The methodology is driven and informed by theoretical analysis and literature review. This is rooted in a combined framework of affect theory and phenomenology, both centering on the explication of human experience. In setting up the methodology, particular hypotheses are established based on this theoretical evaluation: (1) Multimedia art environments such as the Nxt Museum invoke profound embodied and affective experiences through their aesthetic and spatial qualities;¹⁷ (2) The smartphone, and the concurrent impulse to record and document oneself engaging in cultural experiences, poses an additional factor in the museum experience previously conceived of as a relational dialogue between art object, visitor, art critic, and museum;¹⁸ (3) This additional factor, plays a decisive role in the affective art encounter and presence of visitors in the art experience.

Based on these three hypotheses I conducted fieldwork, drawing from digital ethnography practices, which allow me to grasp the specificity of visitors' experiences at the Nxt Museum. I hereby largely follow the book *Digital Ethnography: Principles and Practice* (2016) by Pink et al., as well as the seminal work *Doing Ethnographies* (2007) by Ian Cook and Mike Crang. Integrating an ethnographic approach with a particular focus on digital practices with humanities research may aid in augmenting traditional academic research through an analysis of *lived experience* in the dynamic digital environments of today.¹⁹ This thesis therefore places particular emphasis on the experience of visitors of the Nxt through conducting an on-site visitor study, semi-structured and structured interviews via email and Zoom, as well as a visual content-analysis of self-representational Instagram photos taken at *UFO*. Hereby, I take into

¹⁷ See also Vékony (2017).

¹⁸ Biswas, *Art as Dialogue*, viii.

¹⁹ Pink et al., *Digital Ethnography*, 14.

account theory, artworks at the Nxt, and voluntary participants as both the subject and the object of my research.²⁰ This ethnographic method reveals qualitative data about the human condition and experience which, when consolidated with existing theories, may form new ways of understanding art experience in the digital age.

In researching the use, effects, and consequences of digital media in art spaces, however, it is crucial not to step into the fallacy of an overly media-centric approach, which overlooks the embodied realities underpinning digital media. I therefore follow Pink et al. in a “non-digital-centric approach to the digital,” which takes into consideration how the latter is part of our shared social, sensorial, and affective environment, as well as the embodied and material experiences of virtual-digital realms.²¹ A primary challenge in studying art experience is participants’ inability to fully articulate the breadth and nuance of their experiences retroactively. In order to work through such difficulties, Pink et al. maintain the necessity of full immersion in people’s experiences by the ethnographic researcher.²² A first step in this research was therefore visiting the Nxt Museum to better grasp the ways in which people might react to the artworks in the exhibition *UFO*, as well as observe their behaviors within the gallery space. These observations will be woven into the descriptions of the artworks and behaviors of interviewees throughout this research.

In order to collect primary, qualitative data on visitors’ experiences of the exhibition, I first created a research account on the social media platform Instagram, which contains more information about myself and the research, in order to appear approachable to prospective participants and ensure transparency. I proceeded to collect approximately 400 Instagram posts with the geotag ‘Nxt Museum, Amsterdam’ to limit the number to a manageable amount within the scope of this research and have a possibly reproducible number for future research (fig. 4). I ensured that all collected posts were self-representational photographs of museum visitors taken at *UFO* no earlier than the exhibition’s opening on June 11, 2022, stemming from personal, public accounts (thus ruling out any promotional, commercial or professional Instagram

²⁰ Pink et al., *Digital Ethnography*, 5.

²¹ Ibid., 7. This approach parallels those of *media phenomenology*, which can be defined as an alternative way of conducting research in new media, whereby media is conceived not as a neutral phenomenon, but transformative of human existence and experience (Oxford Reference, “Media Phenomenology”). As this thesis centers on the effects of technologies such as smartphones and new media installation art on the visitors’ experience of contemporary art based on affective and phenomenological frameworks, this methodology might be more fitting than, say, digital sociology or ethnography.

²² Pink et al., *Digital Ethnography*, 21.

accounts) owned by consenting adults above the age of 18. Based on these criteria, I contacted approximately 100 Instagram users at random, via in-app direct messaging, of which 37 showed interest in participating in my research. A further four participants were found through snowball sampling and my personal network.²³ Depending on the participant's preference, I conducted structured interviews via email, or semi-structured interviews via Zoom call. Ultimately, 25 interviews were completed.²⁴ Naturally, there were ethical considerations faced during the data collection. In accordance with the ethical considerations of the General Data Protection Regulation of the European Union, I ensured that all research subjects gave their informed consent to the use of their statements for research purposes, as well as the use of their Instagram posts.²⁵ To safeguard the participants' privacy, and assure the confidential handling of their information, all names and Instagram handles were removed from their files. Participants will therefore be referred to by a pseudonym throughout this research.

The following chapters are structured by the patterns and trends found in visitors' accounts of their experiences of *UFO* through thematic coding. The first chapter defines art experience, and the specificity of *digital* art experience combined with smartphone usage at the Nxt Museum, highlighting the spatial and aesthetic qualities of two particular artworks of *UFO*: Julius Horsthuis' *Foreign Nature* and Oseanworld's *nu radio World Tour*. Furthermore, this chapter outlines the phenomenological and affective qualities of the two artworks, emphasizing the body and its perceived dissolution in immersive installation art at the Nxt. Chapter II delineates the principles of (re)mediation at the Nxt Museum, whereby the artworks oscillate between an inherent aspiration for the immediacy of experience and an aesthetics of hypermediacy. Hereby, the smartphone and its primary use as a photo-taking device for visitors is re-established as an extension of their mental and physical faculties, which in turn significantly shape their perception of and behavior in the artworks. Lastly, chapter III attempts to redefine the meaning of presence in (art) experience from the perspective of the visitors, whereby smartphone usage lends visitors' experience a dual quality that designates smartphone photography as an

²³ Snowball sampling is a recruitment method by which participants help the researcher in finding other potential subjects through their personal or professional networks.

²⁴ The 25 participants in this research were aged between 18 and 30, a majority of which identified as female. Their backgrounds varied, many of them visiting the museum from abroad, as part of a touristic excursion to Amsterdam. Due to the scope of this research an intersectional analysis of visitors' identities and the possible effects of this on their art experience cannot be completed. A more in-depth discussion of this drawback can be read in the reflections in chapter V.

²⁵ Crang and Cook, *Doing Ethnographies*, 29.

additional and crucial factor to their involvement in their visit. All chapters combine visitors' first-hand accounts of their experience at the Nxt with known theoretical frameworks in its quest to answer the leading question of the ways in which smartphone usage affects and redirects visitors' engagement and presence in art experiences more broadly. In doing so, this thesis may augment our broader understanding of what art *does* to its viewers in an embodied, emotionally resonant, and affective sense.

II. Defining the Contemporary Digital Experiential Realm

i. Departing from (Art) Experience

Experience itself is an inherently ambiguous and subjective phenomenon.²⁶ Grasping it through theoretical explorations, therefore, becomes all the more difficult in academic research. Nonetheless, there is considerable potential in the academic scrutiny of experience, particularly in the field of contemporary art and digital media. In the following, I therefore define art experience more broadly, as well as outline the viewing conditions of visitors' art experiences at the Nxt Museum specifically.

In colloquial terms, we may understand experience as the perception of and participation in an event.²⁷ Following this, art experience is, put simply, the perception of and participation in an *art event*: the direct confrontation between viewer and artwork. Such a conceptualization of art experience, however, is oversimplified, coinciding with a Kantian subject-object dichotomy.²⁸ Moreover, traditional ontological approaches to art experience exhibit a bifurcation between a subject and object; the former as an *actor*, the latter as being *acted upon*.²⁹ In resolving this dichotomy, philosopher Mikel Dufrenne proposes a phenomenological approach to art experience, whereby the aesthetic object retains a meaning—a light—within, compelling the beholder to not only remain in proximity to it but return to it time and time again. In this sense, the aesthetic object transforms into a *quasi-subject*, holding an agency that allows it to affect and be affected by its beholder.³⁰

Following Dufrenne's theories, it comes to question whether we, as beholders of aesthetic objects, are the object of the art experience ourselves, or whether active engagement with an artwork evens out the field into a linear conversation between two subjects. It thus poses a question of agency. Art historian Goutam Biswas' philosophy of art experience *as dialogue* may hereby bridge the aforementioned binarist relationships present in art encounters, instead recognizing various agents at play in art experience. Biswas' phenomenology of art encompasses four primary actors: "[...] art experience is basically a dialogue between the creator, the beholder,

²⁶ Castellanos, "Neo-Cybernetic Emergence," 162.

²⁷ Merriam-Webster, "Experience."

²⁸ Biswas, *Art as Dialogue*, 18.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 3; Hardt, "Power to be Affected," 217.

and the critic on the one hand, and the art object on the other.”³¹ The critic hereby poses not only a more analytical approach to art but also retains a sense of ‘objective distance’ to the work itself, keeping it from fully affecting them.³² Instead of seeing the artwork as a fully realized, finished product from which meaning may be extracted by deconstructionist and interpretive means, as the art critic does, Biswas conceives of art as an ever-emergent, dynamic phenomenon.³³ Philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer states more aptly: “[...] the work of art has its true being in the fact that it *becomes* an experience changing the person experiencing it.”³⁴ Conceiving of art experience as dialogic thus recognizes both the agency of the artwork and its beholder in their continuously evolving, complex, and nuanced relationship that is both pre-verbal and transcendent of language.³⁵

The universal fundamentality of aesthetic experience thus deserves a new ontology unique to the phenomena it entails, most fittingly the notion of art experience as both a mental and embodied affective domain, incipient and dynamic.³⁶ Instead of departing from the *artworks* displayed in *Unidentified Fluid Other*, and thus granting rigid, interpretative, and intentional fallacies authority in explicating art experience, this research therefore bases itself on first-hand accounts of visitors’ *experiences* at the Nxt Museum, following the aforementioned theorizations of the art encounter. The immersive, hypermediated art installations at the Nxt—consisting largely of dark, empty spaces with monumental screens, colorful, moving light projections and subtle instrumental sounds—encompass certain formal and aesthetic conditions that furthermore designate visitors’ experiences as a distinct phenomenon from the aesthetic experience of more traditional media. Moreover, the artworks at the Nxt, in affecting their beholders sensorially and intellectually, warrant a certain kind of spectator due to their material, aesthetic and expressive characteristics that has yet to be studied theoretically.³⁷ The popularity of the installations as a backdrop for aesthetic Instagram posts further points to an uncharted territory in the experiential realm of such art spaces.

First, it is necessary to examine the principles and viewing conditions of the genre of *installation art* more closely, before delving deeper into the specificities of contemporary

³¹ Dufrenne quoted in Biswas, *Art as Dialogue*, 4.

³² Biswas, *Art as Dialogue*, 14.

³³ *Ibid.*, 16.

³⁴ Gadamer quoted in Biswas, *Art as Dialogue*, 22. Emphasis added.

³⁵ Biswas, *Art as Dialogue*, 5.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 11; Wesseling, *The Perfect Spectator*, 14.

³⁷ Wesseling, *The Perfect Spectator*, 14.

viewing conditions of *new media* art. This term is particularly applicable to the distinct spatial dynamics of the *Nxt*, enjoyed so thoroughly by the participants in this research. The term installation art has become overly saturated with different meanings to the point of near meaninglessness and is used arbitrarily to describe any constellation of objects in a given space. Historically, the term dates back to the 1960s, when installation artists aimed to heighten visitors' awareness and highlight their bodily response to objects installed in closed spaces.³⁸ The spectator, therefore, becomes a central part of installation art, and ultimately aids in its completion. Art historian Claire Bishop states more aptly:

“Rather than imagining the viewer as a pair of disembodied eyes [...], installation art presupposes an *embodied* viewer whose sense of touch, smell and sound are as heightened as their sense of vision. This insistence on the *literal presence* of the viewer is arguably the key characteristic of installation art.”³⁹

Installation art foregrounds the visitor in their physicality and embodied sensitivity. While this is particularly evident in three-dimensional installation pieces as observed in the American Minimalist movement of the 1960s, it comes to question what role embodiment plays in multimedia artworks in *UFO*, which are marked by continued remediation and increased intersections between the real (lived, concrete world) and virtual (digital, imagined, realm of possibilities).

It is pertinent to define how the conditions of the contemporary art experience are reshaped and guided by the complexities of new media in the digital age. New media infiltrate and determine both art-making practices and daily life through code and algorithms that are embedded into the gadgets we carry with us. Directly opposing the centrality of embodied experience evoked by installation art, the digital, informational realm is often allotted a divinist, immaterial quality that tends to neglect the sensing body.⁴⁰ New media theorist Anna Munster, however, surmises that the opposite is the case, in that computational culture and technology infolds and extends bodily capacities whereby the materiality of bodies melds with digital

³⁸ Bishop, *Installation Art*, 6.

³⁹ *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

⁴⁰ Munster, *Materializing New Media*, 19.

media.⁴¹ According to Munster, the new speeds at which new media operate significantly impact the spatiotemporal circumstances of the body that interacts with it, opening up the finite capacities of the latter into infinitely expanding potentialities and intensities.⁴² Reconnecting to aesthetic experience of new media art, media theorist Mark Hansen agrees with the importance of considering the complete human sensory gamut and its aptitude, when combined with new, digital media, in opening up new experiential realms for the beholder of art.⁴³ Hansen hereby defines new media art experience as “intensities of embodied affectivity,” in which the ocularcentrism of Western theorization is redistributed to the other senses, the haptics of technology, as well as affective emotional and cognitive states.⁴⁴

In its affectivity, new media art is a broad phenomenon loosely circumscribing art that is made by media technologies, including but not limited to computer graphics, virtual design, AI-generated visuals, sound art, interactive features, and video games.⁴⁵ It is not a static genre, but an evolving practice through which the possibilities and complexities of digital technologies are explored artistically. Two artworks at the Nxt Museum, namely *Foreign Nature* (fig. 3) by Julius Horsthuis (b. 1980) and *nu radio World Tour* (fig. 2) by Oseanworld (b. 1996)—the most popular artworks for visitors’ Instagram posts—are hereby particularly noteworthy. They occupy a specific niche in new media art, namely that of immersive installation art that aesthetically distinguishes itself from other new media art forms through their spatial quality, darkness, and continuous projections of light, as well as their origin in algorithmic generation. The interdisciplinary artist and theorist Carlos Castellanos defines such artworks as art experiences, or rather *symbiogenic* experiences:

“[...] where mind, body and an increasingly technologized environment interrelate to give rise to a sensory experience that arises from a dynamic wherein human conscious and preconscious processes can be thought of as locatable both within the traditional bounds of the subject and also dispersed without, in a myriad of intelligent technological structures.”⁴⁶

⁴¹ Munster, *Materializing New Media*, 19.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 64.

⁴³ Wesseling, *The Perfect Spectator*, 20.

⁴⁴ Hansen, *New Philosophy for New Media*, 12.

⁴⁵ MasterClass, “What Is New Media Art?”

⁴⁶ Castellanos, “Neo-Cybernetic Emergence,” 161.

The art experience in the digital realm thus extends from dialogic to symbiogenic, implying the disintegration of clear boundaries between human and machine both in art, but also in their seamless cooperation in all areas of life, which fundamentally alter human cognition.⁴⁷ AI-generated art, according to Castellanos, produces a consolidation between artwork and viewer: a reciprocal relationship with our technological environment marked by “notions of emergence, complexity, and ambiguity.”⁴⁸ Such theorizations of new media art extend beyond the cultural field, trickling into all facets of daily life by means of mobile, digital devices such as smartphones, smart-watches, urban interfaces, and more.

It is evident that digital media have become enmeshed with both cultural production and consumption, therefore constituting a lasting component of the art experience. This further extends to social media, particularly visually-oriented social media platforms such as Instagram, used by millions daily to communicate selected aspects of their lives photographically, as can be seen with the overwhelming popularity of the Nxt on this platform. The ability to take out your phone, snap, and share a picture at any given point in time affords users new connectivity with the world, the consequences of which are yet to be fully grasped.⁴⁹ The following, therefore, outlines the specificity and allure of the art experience at the Nxt and the ways in which practices of digital photography and social media sharing have come to shape and guide museum visitors’ attention and behavior in gallery spaces, finding knowledge in the locus of experience itself.

ii. The Allure of Immersive Art Installations at the Nxt Museum

In order to delve deeper into the aforementioned experiential realm of the artworks at the Nxt Museum it is pivotal to gain a better image of their aesthetic and spatial qualities, as already alluded to in the introductory vignette. As the definition of (new media) art experience has been established, this subchapter delves deeper into the specificity of art experience at the Nxt, paying particular attention to the spatial configuration of the installations therein. The following focuses on the two aforementioned installations Julius Horsthuis’ *Foreign Nature* and Oseanworlds’ *nu*

⁴⁷ Castellanos, “Neo-Cybernetic Emergence,” 164.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 160.

⁴⁹ This research maintains an optimistic outlook on the potentials of social media and smartphone photography, yet, the underlying capitalist and consumerist structures of such habits need to be seen critically. Due to the scope of this research, such exacting theories cannot be covered in their entirety. For a longer explanation of this limitation, see the discussion in chapter V.

radio World Tour, which were particularly popular Instagram motifs. It thus stands to reason that the two immersive installation artworks retain certain aesthetic qualities—what I call an *aesthetics of hypermediation*—that are particularly compelling for the self-representational photography practices of Instagram users.

The installation *Foreign Nature* (fig. 3) encompasses a large room filled with colorful, moving light projections. Benches at the back of the space allow visitors to sit and contemplate the moving visuals that are made up of geometric and organic patterns, reminiscent of viruses and DNA spirals that fluidly morph into landscapes of futuristic wastelands and architectural constellations seen in video games. The continuity of the projections and their vibrant colors pose a technological imitation of patterns in nature, as well as visuals evoked by psychoactive drugs. The projections cover three walls and the floors of the room in their entirety, creating an immersive and dynamic environment that is overlaid with ambient music, through which visitors can move, sit and lay at their leisure. Horsthuis works almost exclusively with algorithmically generated fractal designs, using the software Mandelbulb3D. The Dutch digital artist sees himself less as an artist in the traditional sense, and more as a documentary filmmaker, who searches for self-similar, fractal imagery that replicates itself increasingly in scale, already produced by formulaic code.⁵⁰

nu radio World Tour (fig. 2) constitutes a large, darkened space comparable in scale to an empty warehouse. A single, colossal canvas hangs from the ceiling and continues to spill onto the floor, halting only at the benches perched towards the back. The vivid light projections that follow fluidly enact a gigantic playground in which two comic characters—Kami 227 and Kami 334—guide the visitor through challenges that involve jumping, exploring the space, and competing or collaborating with their neighbors. Oseanworld’s intention behind this life-size, interactive video game with a “sugar-rush aesthetic,” is to revive and awaken the visitors’ inner child, giving them space to play and indulge in their respective fantasy world, whilst sharing in this experience with surrounding visitors.⁵¹ The community-building aspect of video games is central to the installation that rekindles the joys of childhood in its visitors.

For the sake of brevity, and foregrounding visitors’ experience and perception of the aforementioned artworks this thesis focuses primarily on their spatial and aesthetic qualities,

⁵⁰ Nxt Museum, “Foreign Nature.”

⁵¹ Nxt Museum, “nu radio World Tour.”

although their socio-political underpinnings and artist intentionality leave much potential for future research. What binds the aforementioned artworks together is primarily their immersive quality, meaning they surround the visitor in their three-dimensionality. Furthermore, both installations derive from code, graphic design, and digital rendering, actualizing computer algorithms in the vibration of sound, colorful light projections, and, in the case of *nu radio World Tour*, interactive features. In this sense both artworks are distinctly hypermediated, meaning that they are mediated to a much greater extent than more static, traditional artistic media like acrylic painting or marble sculpture, or even a computer-generated video.⁵² In its aesthetics of hypermediation, this type of art further provides a stark contrast to viewing practices evidenced in the more linear contemplation of paintings, for instance. The practice of immersive installation art with its interpolation between light and dark, audio-visual environments, and multimedia features is long-withstanding.⁵³ A museum filled entirely with new media, immersive installation art, however, remains an exceptional occurrence to date. Horsthuis' and Oseanworld's installations show not only the seemingly endless new possibilities afforded by digital technologies for the artworld but also allude to an uncharted dimension of contemporary art viewing practices concomitant with the advent of smartphone photography, and social media sharing.⁵⁴

Aesthetically speaking, the immersive installation artworks at the Nxt Museum align with the aesthetic conventions of Instagram itself, compelling viewers to have their photographs taken in front of the installations. New media scholar Lev Manovich outlines this Instagram aesthetic as marked by principles of minimal, modern design, limited colors, and geometric, repetitive, and rhythmic elements.⁵⁵ Furthermore, Manovich surmises that Instagram aesthetics are led by a visual poeticism that foregrounds the atmospheric effect of pictures.⁵⁶ While Horthuis' and

⁵² While the background coding of a computer-generated video or print may remain the same as in the light projections of the two installations in question, the light projections themselves, as well as the bespoke soundscape accompanying them, are an added layer of mediation. In this sense, such immersive, new media installation art is more hypermediate than a static print or video on a screen, going beyond the mere spatial configuration of the former.

⁵³ As seen for instance in Yayoi Kusama's *Infinity Mirrored Rooms*, Bill Viola's enormous video screens and James Turrel's mind-boggling light and color installations in the 1990s, or Olafur Eliasson's monumental, multisensory installations at the turn of the millennium.

⁵⁴ Think of, for instance, Kusama's resurgence in popularity around 2017—2018 due to the aesthetic conventions of her *Infinity Mirrored Rooms* that show viewers reflected infinitely amongst a sea of colorful lights or bold polka dots (See also Boxer, 2017; Loughrey, 2018).

⁵⁵ Manovich, *Instagram and Contemporary Image*, 95-96.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 85-86.

Oceanworld's installations encompass maximalist color palettes and motifs, the former manifests dynamic visual rhythms grounded in the geometry of fractal design, whereas the latter makes use of colorful geometric shapes and thus a minimal visual environment. This clarifies why both artworks align closely with Instagram aesthetics as proposed by Manovich and have thus become the most popular motifs of the exhibition. The result is a stream of mostly vertical pictures on Instagram with dark silhouettes of people either positioned centrally in the frame or to the left or right edge, aligning somewhat with the rule of thirds composition, interspersed with some close-up photographs showing the individual's features more clearly, as they are shot from the torso upwards.

The high demand for aesthetically pleasing installation environments for social media users has led to countless so-called 'Instagram Museums' to pop up across the globe, including several such institutions dedicated entirely to playful, eye-catching, and camera-ready sets for creating the perfect Instagram post.⁵⁷ It comes to question what distinguishes the Nxt Museum from similar experiential spaces in the Netherlands, such as 'Amaze,' 'Wondr,' or the 'Youseum'. While this query should be elaborated on in depth in future research, a perhaps simplistic answer would be that the Nxt Museum showcases *artworks*, made by artists whose primary intention is (to the best of our knowledge) not to provide mere backdrops for photographs.⁵⁸ Surprisingly, however, this byproduct of artworks such as *Foreign Nature* and *nu radio World Tour*, is not only welcomed by the institution that houses them but is highly encouraged. Upon entering the Nxt, an employee welcomes visitors with the phrase: "Stay a while, have a little dance, do whatever you want! Take pictures, but make sure to turn off the flash—and of course, tag us!" It becomes clear that taking pictures and using your phone to interact with the space is greatly promoted by the institution itself.

While this may add to people's motivation to take pictures of and with artworks, none of the participants mentioned that this played a role during their visit. It is more likely, then, that encouraging on-site photography is a means for the museum to stimulate an organic social media marketing process through user-generated content, whereby visitors' enthusiasm about the exhibition expressed through platforms such as Instagram and TikTok will inspire additional audiences to visit the museum. It is particularly wholly immersive installations, as pictured at

⁵⁷ Pardes, "Selfie Factories."

⁵⁸ See also Sima (2021) for a detailed differentiation between art museums and Instagram museums.

the Nxt, that gain rapid popularity on the aforementioned social media platforms.⁵⁹ Indeed, the majority of interviewees stated that they were compelled to visit the Nxt Museum after having seen videos and photos of it on TikTok and Instagram. Felix (fig. 5), who visited the Nxt Museum during a trip to Amsterdam with his friends, for instance said: “[...] we were really intrigued by the visual spectacle shown on TikTok and Instagram.” Statements by the interviewees have shown that the popularity of the artworks at *Unidentified Fluid Other* is twofold: firstly, visitors are drawn to the exhibition by the unparalleled aesthetics of the artworks. Secondly, visitors are intrigued by the uniqueness of the hypermediated environments and the extraordinary experience the artworks offer them.

I argue that visitors’ aesthetic fascination is trumped by the *uniqueness of the experience* offered by the two installation artworks, which most interviewees refer to as “projection rooms.”⁶⁰ The aforementioned composition of visitors’ Instagram posts, namely the individual captured in their entirety often standing, sitting, or walking *inside of* the artwork, elucidate the importance of spatial immersion, or what scholar Adam Suess calls *lived spatial experience*, for visitors.⁶¹ This notion is further affirmed by the fact that many interviewees also posted more than one picture, and included videos of the installation in their posts, thanks to the Instagram carousel feature,⁶² which allows others to see them move through the space, shows different angles and thus grants a glimpse of the immensity of the projection rooms. This is for instance reflected in Colin’s Instagram post consisting of seven pictures and videos (fig. 6). The spatial immersion in the three-dimensional rooms is, however, not the only feature of the artworks at the Nxt that makes it a unique experience. Most interviewees visited the museum as part of their tourist visit to Amsterdam, who wanted to see something special that they would otherwise not be able to see, or even have access to, in their respective home countries. Those already living in the Netherlands visited the Nxt on a special occasion, like Ayla (fig. 7), who wanted to do

⁵⁹ Loh, *Mediating the Museum Experience*, 11.

⁶⁰ All but one interviewee visited the Nxt for the first time, and had furthermore not experienced similar environments (such as Instagram museums) before. The allure of novelty and uniqueness of experience thus might not be applicable to those who regularly visit institutions with similarly immersive new media artworks. Nonetheless, there is still novelty and excitement to be found in the artworks *as art*, beyond aesthetics, meaning the original ideas, as well as the conceptual and educational value they hold. Furthermore, as opposed to many Instagram museums, the Nxt has no permanent display. New exhibitions are introduced annually, maintaining the novelty effect of the institution.

⁶¹ Suess, “Instagram and Art Gallery Visitors,” 110.

⁶² The Instagram Carousel feature allows platform users to add more than one, and up to ten, videos or photographs to a singular post.

something memorable for her birthday. Similarly, Phoebe and her partner Nick (fig. 8) visited the museum for Nick's "surprise birthday," whereas Bennet (fig. 9) and Henry (fig. 10) wanted to have a "different" experience. Lara (fig. 23) explains that she visited the Nxt because she was intrigued by its contrast to more traditional museums like the Rijksmuseum; she wanted a fresh and cool experience or, in her words, to "try something new."

One can deduce that many visitors did not go solely for the aesthetics, the content, or the theme of the art exhibited at *UFO*, or even the genre of art shown there. Instead, most interviewees were compelled specifically by the uniqueness of the experience warranted by the accumulation of immersive new media art installations in one place and the sensations these promise to invoke in their contemplator. It comes to question what exactly makes the Nxt Museum such a collective object of curiosity, intrigue, and wonder for its prospective visitors, seeing that similar experiences (as listed above) already exist. In clarifying this phenomenon, Michel Foucault's concept of *heterotopia* as described in the poststructuralist's essay "Of Other Spaces" (1986) proves useful. According to Foucault, heterotopias are utopian spaces of inversion and deviation from societal norms that manifest in reality.⁶³ As such, heterotopias simultaneously challenge, produce and transpose the sociocultural structures they find themselves in.⁶⁴ The urban studies scholar John Pløger further identifies heterotopian spaces as multiplicitous "spaces of otherness," which differ from what is considered the normal "mode of social ordering," when brought vis-à-vis similar cultural spaces.⁶⁵ Moreover, heterotopian spaces are characterized by their temporal and dynamic nature; ever-shifting, never static.⁶⁶ It is precisely the contrast of heterotopian spaces—the temporary suspension of usual order and regulation—to their 'normal' counterparts that make them alluring to the public. Both in form and content the artworks at the Nxt Museum pose an inversion of the typical practices and expectations of museum spaces, as it significantly alters the ways in which visitors move through, contemplate, and consume art, by means of new media employed in the artworks themselves and the peculiar photographic practices the visitors engage during their visit. To better understand the nature of the Nxt Museum and spaces like it, it is perhaps advantageous to reconceptualize them as heterotopias in the Foucauldian vein. Doing so extricates the space from

⁶³ Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 24.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Pløger, "Presence-Experiences," 851.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

its entanglement in static definitions of the traditional museum and examines it as an institution in its own right, as a reflection of the contemporary sociocultural *Zeitgeist*.

Deviation from the norm may instill curiosity, excitement, and wonder. Munster elaborates on the Cartesian notion of wonder as the primary passion of human sensibility, precluding those notions of emotion or cognition.⁶⁷ Hereby, Munster defines passions as follows: “Passions manifested themselves corporeally, changing expression, demeanor, and gesture in their bearer.”⁶⁸ While Cartesian philosophy and its dualistic inclination remain controversial in contemporary discourse, the passion of wonder symbolizes a coalescence of mind and body in the allure of the unfamiliarity or novelty of an object that may capture and hold our attention.⁶⁹ Once drawn to an object by the passion of wonder, curiosity follows, instilling us with the urge to rationalize and make sense of the wondrous object we are faced with.⁷⁰ In translating this theory to the contemporary realm, wonder may explain the ineffable yet magnetic attraction and curiosity prospective visitors of the Nxt may feel. This enticement of the unknown and unknowable may furthermore explicate the urge to photograph it. Hence, capturing the object of wonder photographically allows visitors to return to it later in their quest to make sense of the experience.

Portraying oneself having an experience, however, has come to supersede the portrayal of the experience itself, and with good reason: self-representational photography in front of artworks allows for the expression of individuality and agency through the illustration of the visitors’ own creative spatial interpretation of the work, whereas taking a mere photograph of the artwork remains somewhat anonymous. Interviewee Mia (fig. 11) humorously stated that after being contacted for this research, she browsed the geotag of the Nxt Museum, only to find that her Instagram post—in which she is seen sitting on the floor of *Foreign Nature*, looking at deep blue, pink and yellow swirls unfurling before her—was almost identical to the posts of others. To that end, the darkened silhouette of a visitor against the luminous light projections may be less unique than the close-up shots of other visitors, which opposes the perceived uniqueness of the experience itself. Interviewee Emma (fig. 12), who posted three pictures of herself standing

⁶⁷ Munster, *Materializing New Media*, 70-71; Munster here refers to René Descartes’ ‘Passions of the Soul’ that delineates six ‘passions’ of human sensibility, including wonder, love, hate, desire, joy, and sadness. These are now known as, and thus comparable to, experiences or emotions.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 72.

closely against the wall, smiling and looking around her as she is covered in red and blue patterns, explains this further. Although she and her friends, who visited the museum specifically to take Instagram pictures, first wanted to take full-body shots, they soon resorted to closer framing:

“First [we took] body shots, but [...] we came to the conclusion that you don’t really see your facial expressions. And then we started taking the pics from up here [gestures to chest] [...] so you could see your face and those projections were just very pretty on your face.”

The compulsion to take pictures due to the uniqueness of the space fundamentally restructures the viewing conditions of this specific type of art, namely immersive, multisensory, new media art installations. Visitors increasingly carry their smartphones with them to museum visits, always ready to snap a picture or pass it onto a second party to capture them posing in front of—or in this case *in*—the artworks. Before delving deeper into practices of smartphone remediation, however, it is important to expound further on the importance of embodiment and affective experience in the digital age.

iii. The Phenomenology and Affect of the Nxt Experience: Embodiment and Its Dissolution

This subchapter establishes a more material explication of embodied, physical sensation and their emotional resonance through cognitive rationalization that interviewees experienced at the Nxt Museum, particularly in the two ‘projection rooms’ *Foreign Nature* and *nu radio World Tour*. When faced with technologies and digital spaces, embodiment has been given little space in academic research, as opposed to intellectual resonances thereof. It has become apparent, however, that the body, or rather *embodiment*—which is necessitated by its spatiotemporal situatedness within physical and sociocultural contexts—is pivotal in outlining the experience of installation artworks as seen in the Nxt.⁷¹ Munster hereby emphasizes the “material and affective forces” at play in digital spaces in order to reformulate and better understand the subjective experience of the visitor.⁷² By this means, the material-spatial qualities of the (digital) machine

⁷¹ Munster, *Materializing New Media*, 62.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 7.

and the human body it interacts with need to be considered, as they are continuously *doing* and *undoing* one another.⁷³

A central tenet of affect theory outlines the body's ability to be affected through several stimuli that impinge upon the skin continuously. Affect, then, is an incipient, ever-emerging and autonomous phenomenon: a *becoming* of precognitive, proprioceptive and kinaesthetic sensations or *intensities*, felt first on the body's skin, and are only brought into cognition retroactively.⁷⁴ As these affects are always in motion, and our processual sensation of them inherently *incipient*, their translation from theory into real, lived experience is convoluted. Ethnographers Pink et al. point out that embodied experience, as "lived through sensory and affective modes," is often near impossible to articulate through language, therefore posing a predicament to studying said experience.⁷⁵ Philosopher and affect theorist Brian Massumi goes as far as contending that affective intensities, once captured and articulated through emotion and cognition, are no longer part of the affective realm at all.⁷⁶ Indeed, all participants in this research found it difficult, if not impossible, to recall their physical sensations during their respective experiences at the Nxt, to the point some decided to skip the question entirely. Mia (fig. 11) stated that she usually does not pay attention to her physical sensations when visiting museums. This affirms the internalized primacy of vision that has trickled down from the traditions of art historical contemplation and the logic of its development to everyday art museum visitors.

Looking at the two 'projection rooms' in the Nxt, intensities or affects are realized in the fluid emanation of colorful lights and vibrating soundwaves unto the visitors' bodies. Recounting physical impression is thus crucial to understanding affective embodiment in this art experience, and participants were ensuingly asked to recall their subjective sensations during *UFO* in order to better grasp the complexities of lived affective encounters. What resulted was a jumble of emotions deeply entangled with physical sensations, suspended between extremely positive and rather negative reactions. Without exception, all participants had profoundly ambivalent responses to the artworks at the Nxt, ranging from confused, overwhelmed and overstimulated, to being impressed, in awe, and surprised by the artworks, to ultimately feeling joy and happiness about them. That is to say, despite this ambivalence, all participants concluded that

⁷³ Munster, *Materializing New Media*, 13.

⁷⁴ Massumi, "Autonomy of Affect," 85.

⁷⁵ Pink et al., *Digital Ethnography*, 21.

⁷⁶ Massumi, "Autonomy of Affect," 87.

their visit to the Nxt was a predominantly positive, enriching experience. As to the specificities of registered physical sensation, quite a few participants felt overstimulated, and felt the need to adjust to the miscellany of light, color, and sound. Arden (fig. 13) for instance, felt her eyes widening when she entered *Foreign Nature*, and recounted a dizzying sensation at the enormity of the installation. For Arden, it was hard to look at the lights at first, and she was sensitive to the loud bass music, but her sensitivity subsided as she spent more time in the artwork. Many participants reported that they felt a sense of tingling, or dizziness upon entering the projection room. Participant Zoey described this sensation as a “loss of stability” when she entered the installations of the ‘projection rooms’. This may be due to the continuously moving projections on the floor of *Foreign Nature*, making it hard for the body to discern it as stable, immobile ground. The expectation of a hard and unmoving floor beneath our feet is defied by the fluid light projections that give the illusion of a moving surface. Zoey’s loss of stability thus exemplifies the dissonance between the body’s ability to be affected by physical and material stimuli before we are able to classify these sensations rationally. This disconnect epitomizes the incipience of affect. Similarly to Zoey, interviewee Tara (fig. 14) felt overstimulated by the extent of input received from the installations at the Nxt. Moreover, she found it challenging to determine what she felt:

“I didn’t know at first what to feel exactly because [there] was just so much input. When I entered the room with the moving light I felt kind of carsick actually. I felt a little bit dizzy and like my body was moving with the lights.”

The intense physical sensation of motion sickness and nausea points at a similar loss of orientation that Zoey experienced. Like Arden and Zoey, however, these overwhelming feelings subsided the more Tara spent time in the installation.

This interval of adjustment parallels Massumi’s theorization of the *missing half-second*. The philosopher argues that sensation encompasses a “backward referral in time,” meaning that it can only recursively be brought into a linear chain of action and reaction as the body is always open to stimuli, quickly absorbing a myriad of impulses subconsciously.⁷⁷ Massumi further alleges that it takes half a second for a person to sense or become aware of something. There is

⁷⁷ Massumi, “Autonomy of Affect,” 89.

therefore a missing half-second in human sensation—comparable to a glitch or lag in digital media—which becomes filled with all potentiality of action and reaction, with the potentiality of affect.⁷⁸ In this sense, the time participants needed to adjust to the new environment posed by the art installations can be transposed onto the missing half-second in which embodied and affective sensations are consolidated and brought into consciousness. The apparent disconnect between sensory gamut and conscious registration thereof furthermore explains why participants found it difficult to formulate their physical experiences retroactively.

While the aforementioned participants adjusted to the overstimulation they felt, after which they immersed themselves in the flow of intensities in the artwork, an abundance of stimuli may also distract from the experience and the artwork itself due to physical and emotional discomfort. Participants Nick (fig. 8) and Marvin both had peculiar physical sensations that parallel each other, which express this double logic of overstimulation. Nick recounts:

“It did feel a touch [...] I wouldn’t say claustrophobic, but the room makes you feel a little bit boxed in. But I think it’s because the projections were all around you, like [there] was no escaping almost [...]. So maybe that gave me a feeling of... I wouldn’t say anxiety because it was actually quite relaxing, but definitely my body[’s physical state] did change [...].”

Nick also found it hard to recall his physical sensations, reflected in the ambivalence and speculative tone of his statement. He found the experience simultaneously strange and unique, as it oscillated between anxiety, claustrophobia and relaxation. Nick’s sensation of feeling “boxed in” implies a heightened awareness of his own body within the space of the installation and the ways in which it connects with both its confinements and openings. Marvin, on the other hand, describes an oppositional sensation while experiencing the immersiveness of the projection rooms:

⁷⁸ Massumi, “Autonomy of Affect,” 90.

“Marvin: [The] big rooms with all the lights [...] were interesting, because [...] it was a nice feeling of... I don’t want to say floating, but kind of. Like *being part of something*.

Interviewer: You felt like you lost the feeling [of your body]?

Marvin: Yeah, exactly. I was more participating in the whole light experience.”

Instead of heightening the awareness of his body and its positionality as one coordinate of many in the spatial relations of the installation as Nick did, Marvin experienced a dissolution of his body within the artwork. The feeling of floating implies a loss of physical sensation, or dissociation. His participation in the light experience is therefore magnified to the point of its resolution, suggesting a disintegration of any boundaries between body and outside world; the digital and the real. This retains an ‘othering’ quality, wherein the disintegration of the self’s boundaries lends subjects a distinct anonymity that allows them to move through the space discretely and fluidly by melding with the artwork. The visitors start to become the *unidentified fluid other*, that is encapsulated in the exhibition’s title and outlook.

Bishop confers this experience to the condition of darkness—a common artistic instrument employed by installation artists. As both ‘projection rooms’ are distinctly darkened spaces, Bishop’s analysis may aid in further grasping the ambivalent sensations experienced by participants. Darkened installations are becoming a more frequent and familiar phenomenon in contemporary installation art, as they starkly contrast what Bishop calls the “pervasive electrical illumination” of day-to-day life.⁷⁹ Within such spaces, even if it is the observance of a phone screen or television at night, locating one’s own body becomes more difficult. While the installations at the Nxt Museum are suffused with light projections, the concept of darkness still applies here: instead of brightening the space, the projections saturate it completely in color leading to a dematerialization of the space through light, reminding of James Turrell’s infamous color-field installations (fig. 15). According to Bishop, the perception of our physical boundaries within darkness—or in this case spaces of saturated color—disintegrates, leading to an

⁷⁹ Bishop, *Installation Art*, 82.

obliteration of our sense of self.⁸⁰ Similarly literary critic Roger Caillois argues that darkness decenters its subject through invoking a loss of consciousness of the self as coordinator of particular points in space.⁸¹ The body enveloped by darkness begins to coincide with and assimilate to the space it finds itself in. This does not imply a bereaved awareness of the body, but rather an awareness of its loss, as reflected in Marvin's statement.⁸²

Within the dissolution of embodied awareness and its loss, any sense of orientation for the visitor fades. This is augmented by the lack of a focal point in the artworks, particularly *Foreign Nature*, wherein repetitive patterns continue to evolve and mirror one another in a kaleidoscopic manner, yet lacking a center to focus your attention on. In a sense then, having one's picture taken, or taking the picture of another subject within the vast, empty space, acts as an attempt to restore the visual balance of the artworks, recovering a center of attention in the photographed subject. Moreover, the visitor, when photographed in the installation, reinstates a focal point upon which the viewer's eyes may rest in the visual complexity of the light projections surrounding them. Similarly, the focus shifted to one's own body while having your picture taken, through increased attention paid to posing and one's own appearance, may reinforce the sense of self that had begun to disintegrate in the darkness of the installations.⁸³ These ponderings imply that smartphone photography interferes with, or even cuts through, the embodied and affective sensations visitors have in the art installations.

This chapter outlined the definition of new media art experience more broadly, as well as the unique qualities of the art experience at the Nxt Museum specifically. Furthermore, it considered the phenomenological and affective delineations of the two case studies on visitors' integrated embodied and emotional resonance with the works, which were designated as inherently ambivalent affects. As the central query of this research pertains to smartphone usage and its effects on the presence of viewers within installations at the Nxt, the following chapter looks more closely at digital photography within the gallery space.

⁸⁰ Bishop, *Installation Art*, 82.

⁸¹ Roger Caillois quoted in Bishop, *Installation Art*, 84.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 82.

⁸³ Such interpretations of photographic impulses are, of course, only speculative, and removed from the accounts of visitors' lived experiences at the Nxt.

III. Through The Looking Glass: Experiencing Art Through the Smartphone

i. The Principles of (Re)Mediation

It has been made clear the ways in which visitors are affected both in a distinctly embodied and cognitive-emotional sense by the installations at the Nxt. Visitors' experiences reflect a dialogic and symbiogenic relationship between the artwork as *quasi-subject* and the viewer, in which both have the ability to act upon one another. The agency of visitors may be further elucidated through an elaboration of their photographic practices within the gallery space. I argue that within the relational dialogue of the art experience—consisting of object, viewer, art critic, and museum—the ubiquity of smartphone usage (elicited partially by the impulse to document oneself throughout the experience) poses a fifth trajectory within this relation that warrants closer examination. Smartphone usage as remedial tool within (art) experiences may significantly restructure and redirect visitors' attention and engagement therein. Accordingly, Munster suggests that digital media in museum spaces have faced forceful criticism as it weakens the material and historic specificity of the objects on display, postulating that they are looked at in an unmediated way.⁸⁴ This, however, is no longer true for the artwork in the contemporary realm, as smartphones act as constant intermediaries between us and the outside world through affording us a new connectivity to our surroundings, and extending our consciousness to anywhere in the world. This subchapter therefore addresses the principles of smartphone remediation as exemplified at the Nxt Museum, considering the motivations, embodied sensations, and effects for smartphone users in the gallery space.

Taking pictures was first and foremost an enjoyable activity for the majority of participants. Georgia (fig. 16), for instance, enjoyed taking pictures with her phone because she could see the outcome straight away. If she was satisfied with the photographs this would instill gratification in her. The ability to check pictures immediately, while still in the museum, indicates a disruption of seamless interactions between viewer and artwork, whereby the viewer's attention is turned away from the artwork; towards their phones. Indeed, every participant in this research, without exception, carried their phones with them during their visit to the Nxt, either in their pockets or small bags. The phone, therefore, retains an ability to affect people both in an embodied and psychological sense, through for instance, the vibration of an

⁸⁴ Munster, *Materializing New Media*, 56.

incoming notification, or the urge to periodically check social media.⁸⁵

Taking pictures is always a means of remediating an art experience while it is happening. By definition, mediation is the “transmission by an intermediate mechanism or agency.”⁸⁶ Remediation in the literal sense, therefore, encompasses a double-mediation: when a mediated object, person, or environment undergoes another process of intermediate transmission through an intermediary mechanism. At the Nxt, remediation takes place in the mediation of an already hypermediated environment—meaning an abundance of mediation within a designated space—via the phone. The camera function hereby replicates, or *remediates* one’s surrounding environment onto its two-dimensional screen, as can be seen in @alessandropisan’s Instagram post, which pictures him immersed in the process of photographing *nu radio World Tour* (fig. 17). This phenomenon will hereafter be referred to as smartphone remediation.

New media scholars Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, in *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (1999), surmise that new media follow a double logic of remediation, pivoting between immediacy and hypermediacy. It is particularly with the advent of digital media that remediation is becoming increasingly relevant to understanding visual culture. Since the book’s publication in 1999, the surge of technological innovation only attests to the exponential growth of the two phenomena. In defining the double logic of remediation, the two authors describe immediacy in opposition to hypermediacy, stating: “[...] the logic of immediacy dictates that the medium itself should disappear and leave us in the presence of the thing represented [...]”⁸⁷ Hypermediacy, on the other hand, is an environment similar to a website, overlaid with various graphics, hyperlinks, animations, photographs, and more. In the contemporary realm, we can designate the smartphone as a hypermediated device through the various applications, connectivities, sounds, and haptics it affords. Similarly, the installations at the Nxt are inherently hypermediated: from their origin in computer algorithms and artificial intelligence; to their display by means of screens, computers, and projections, as well as their *representation of* various media. This is seen for instance in Oseanworld’s comic book characters or the virtual guide in *Viatrice’s Odyssey* (fig. 18)—a humanoid, androgynous avatar designed by 3D artist and AR creator Harriet Davey (b. 1997, she/they), who is the embodiment of the

⁸⁵ The urge to check social media periodically has been attributed to a rush of dopamine new notifications, likes and comments may instill in their receivers, which also retains an addictive quality. See also Macit et al. (2018) for an elaboration on dopamine and addiction in social media users.

⁸⁶ Merriam-Webster, “Mediation.”

⁸⁷ Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, 5-6.

exhibition's overarching theme *Unidentified Fluid Other*. The hypermediated environment at the Nxt adds in part to its designation as heterotopia in the Foucauldian sense. Moreover, its hypermediacy is a direct inversion of traditional art museums that display media such as painting, photography, and sculpture, which discern a linear, unmediated way of viewing art devoid of intermediate mechanisms or technological interventions. Although museums are increasingly incorporating layers of mediation themselves—think of audio guides, AR-layer apps, or QR codes,—the hypermediated environment at the Nxt remains a unique, heterotopic environment.

Bolter and Grusin infer that hypermediated spaces are designed to be pleasurable and that society greatly appreciates acts of mediation.⁸⁸ This allure of hypermediacy is reflected in the overwhelmingly positive response participants had to the Nxt. Yet, simultaneously, the collective yearning for immediacy in a hypermediated world is becoming more urgent; people increasingly express the desire to attend 'live' experiences, free of mediation.⁸⁹ Bolter and Grusin coin this the "desire for immediacy." To further differentiate between hypermediacy and immediacy, Bolter and Grusin aptly state:

"If the logic of immediacy leads one either to *erase* or to *render automatic* the act of representation, the logic of hypermediacy acknowledges multiple acts of representation and makes them *visible*. Where immediacy suggests a unified visual space, contemporary *hypermediacy offers a heterogeneous space, in which representation is conceived of not as a window to the world, but rather as 'windowed' itself*—with windows that open onto other representations or other media."⁹⁰

Following this distinction, one can deduce that traditional media such as painting attempt to erase any traces of mediation in their quest for immediacy through direct representation: a window into the world of the object—à la Renaissance scholar Leon Battista Alberti—wherein the viewer is enclosed *within* the same space. In the Nxt, this immediacy is achieved through an apparent erasure of the hypermediated mechanisms behind the immersive projections in *Foreign*

⁸⁸ Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, 14.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 33-34. Emphasis added.

Nature and *nu radio World Tour*: both installations are unified, contained spaces in which the viewer is engulfed in a mesmerizing world of light, sound, and color. Bolter and Grusin confirm that digital art often encompasses the creation of phantasmic, dream-like worlds that represent the desire for immediacy in their effort to actualize that which we can only fantasize about.⁹¹ The spatial disposition of installation art, however, negates the need for a frame or window into this new world, instead standing as an itself already windowed entity in three-dimensional space that follows the logic of hypermediation. Once museum visitors take out their smartphones to capture a picture of the installation, the hypermediated device ruptures the immediacy of the immersive space, opening up a window that fragments the sensorial experience into something more digestible: the vertical frame of the smartphone. In this sense, the phone screen cuts into the spatial logic of the installations, rendering and flattening the three-dimensional space into a two-dimensional format. The two installations at the Nxt and their latent photographic allure are therefore simultaneously immediate and hypermediated, aligning with the double logic of remediation.

The remediation at the Nxt Museum lies not only within the double logic of immediacy and hypermediacy but within the *(re)framing* of the art experience to fit the screen of visitors' smartphones as they are taking pictures. Moreover, the smartphone as frame or window through which the artworks are, if only temporarily, looked at by their users acts as a crucial tier between the visitor and the visual spectacle unfolding before them. New media scholar Stephen Monteiro argues that the prevailing features of visual experience are dictated by the parameters of the full-screen image.⁹² This guiding presence of the image-frame becomes apparent in the vertical orientation of smartphones, which in turn impacts the composition of photographs taken by contemporary smartphone users. As landscape pictures do not fully fill the vertical screen of the smartphone when held upright, smartphone users are more inclined to take vertical snapshots of their surroundings: almost all interviewees posted vertically oriented pictures of their experiences on Instagram. Quoting American cultural critic Vivian Sobchack, Monteiro elaborates: “[...] the various screens confronting the contemporary viewer ‘solicit and shape our presence to the world, [and] our representation in it [...]’”⁹³ Screens, therefore, have a significant impact on how one is present in and represents the surrounding world, and may fundamentally

⁹¹ Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, 136.

⁹² Monteiro, “Fit to Frame,” 361.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 363-364.

alter subjective experience. Furthermore, screens are radically redefining visual culture and experience through the materiality of the touchscreen that acts as a membrane through which images are not only perceived visually but also by tactile means.⁹⁴ The responsive tactility of smartphone touchscreens therefore further adds to the embodied sensations visitors experience in the Nxt Museum. In this sense, the smartphone broadens the sensory scope of museum visitors, thus acting as an extension of their affective faculties.

ii. Extending the Self: The Immediacy of the Smartphone

The aesthetics of hypermediation at the Nxt Museum and the smartphone as an inherently hypermediated device (that in turn remediates the hypermediated environment at the Nxt as its users take pictures of their surroundings), establishes a double-bind of hypermediation. While the self-contained, otherworldly aesthetics of the installations prove the yearning for immediacy, smartphone usage disintegrates the unity of the space, splintering it into frame-size fragments whereby images of the installation mold into the form of the screen. There are, however, more unexpected modes of immediacy found within smartphone remediation at the Nxt. The ensuing subchapter investigates further possibilities for immediacy within this double-hypermediation by analyzing museum visitors' photographic practices within the gallery space more closely.

As previously mentioned, many interviewees stated that they carried their phones close to their bodies, in their pockets, such that they could take it out quickly to snap a picture of eye-catching aspects of their museum visit. Interviewee Max (fig. 19) spent almost the entire visit with his phone in his hand: “[...] usually I was holding [my phone] in my hand actually. Because I took a lot of picture[s], I had no chance to put it in my pocket.” Holding your smartphone in your hand is an entirely different experience than storing it in your pocket; it is an even closer tactile experience of the medium. Whereas having the phone in your pocket still retains a separation between the technology and your skin through the fabric of your clothes, holding it in your hand allows for direct contact between the skin and the device's surface. Bolter and Grusin indicate that “we see ourselves today in and through our available media,” arguing that our identity is closely aligned with the media we choose to engage with.⁹⁵ Munster takes this further, contending that digital media may extend, if not double our identity, physical

⁹⁴ Monteiro, “Fit to Frame,” 361.

⁹⁵ Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, 231.

competencies and sensorial gamut. Indeed, the human body is essential in communicating and interacting with digital technologies, and the embodied sensations experienced are *not* secondary to the expansion of mental faculties through media. Moreover, Munster states: “Far from disposing of the senses, new media [...] point toward the *synaesthetic disruptions and reconfigurations* of bodily capacities and functions that might be made possible by digital technologies.”⁹⁶ While Munster posits that the relationship between the body and new media is differential, characterized by lags or delays, the lived experiences of interviewees in this research shows no evidence that such deferrals are actively perceived. Rather, the phone as constant, close companion for photographic purposes and locus of connectivity in the participants’ lives suggests the conflation of any boundaries between them and this technology. Accordingly, Castellanos argues that new media may extend the art experience through disintegrating the boundaries between artwork and visitors.⁹⁷ In a sense, the ability to capture one’s experience photographically purports the extension of our mental and physical capacity to store and recall informational and sensorial input from the experience. The smartphone photograph thus extends the ability to remember.⁹⁸ The immediacy of the remediative experience is thus perhaps restored if we conceive of digital media as an extension of the self, particularly when placed in the hands of the observer, following Canadian philosopher Marshall McLuhan’s conceptions in *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*.

The smartphone as extension of the self is furthermore reflected in the naturalization of picture-taking in the contemporary realm. Quite a few participants, including Emma (fig. 12) and Francesca (fig. 20), who visited the museum together, came primarily to take pictures for Instagram. Not only did Emma and Francesca perceive the museum to be naturally photographable due to its aesthetically pleasing composition, Francesca also stated that she is naturally inclined to take pictures of aesthetic environments, whether it is a pretty artwork, or the sunset. Likewise, Phoebe (fig. 8) expressed that she is a visually-oriented person, and that

⁹⁶ Munster, *Materializing New Media*, 19. Emphasis added.

⁹⁷ Castellanos, “Neo-Cybernetic Emergence,” 163-164.

⁹⁸ It is important to see the memorability of photography and its overall use as memory aid critically. Isola et al. (2014) posit that humans have a remarkable visual memory, and are able to retain thousands of pictures at a time, whereby pictures of people are one of the most memorable (1478). My previous research has shown, however, that the memory of *taking the picture* (particularly posing for pictures) may sometimes supersede the memory of the art experience itself (Loh, 2020). This potential pitfall of digital photography may be consolidated by José van Dijk’s theory of digital photography’s formative function in contemporary, networked identity and communication, whereby memory is not erased but reinstated through the digital distribution of the photographs (van Dijk, 2008).

picture-taking is therefore a habitual behavior for her. Overall, Phoebe observed that she took more pictures at the Nxt Museum than she usually would in other art museums:

“I usually don’t take that many pictures in art exhibitions, but I think the digitality of [the Nxt], it’s kind of natural to take pictures of it, in a different way than other forms of art. So the barrier of taking pictures is lower because you’re already in this digital world [...].”

Phoebe felt more compelled to take pictures at the Nxt also because of the interactive features of some artworks, particularly the installations in which she saw herself reflected, such as the artwork *Enter* by Ksawery Kirlewski (2022, fig. 21), and *Wholeland* by The Fabricant (2022, fig. 22).⁹⁹ She felt surprised by this observation, yet also reasoned that the digital, hypermediated environment at the Nxt warrants a heightened phone usage. As such, the smartphone as hypermediate device allows persons to extend themselves into the digitally mediated realm at the Nxt: Enclosed within the visitors’ grasp, the contact point between skin and mobile device is no longer one of difference, but becomes a semi-permeable membrane that organically grants them access into the virtual realm, allowing visitors to experience their surroundings more *immediately*.

The expansive potential of smartphones in the museum space is also reflected in participants’ responses to their motivation for taking pictures (of themselves) in the museum. Participants overwhelmingly stated that they took pictures for memory purposes, and that this process was therefore a positive experience for them. This aligns with my previous research on Instagramming practices, which showed that picture-taking allows visitors to capture and keep memories of the ephemeral museum visit.¹⁰⁰ Despite sharing the pictures on Instagram, thus pointing at a social motivation for taking pictures as well, the memorial function of photography

⁹⁹ In my earlier findings (Loh, 2020), I came to the conclusion that museum visitors are more likely to take pictures of artworks that directly reflect them, through for instance a live video screen or mirrors. Adversely, the findings of this study show that the popularity of such reflective artworks is superseded by the immersive ‘projection rooms’ at the Nxt. Nonetheless, visitors tended to increase their movement while taking pictures in the artworks *Enter* and *Wholeland*, as opposed to posing for pictures in the other installations. This may be due to the perceived dissolution of their sensed embodiment as outlined in chapter II.ii. Moreover, it seems that the externalized reflection of the self *in* the artwork contributes to the perceived dissolution of the body. Increased movement in such installations therefore allows visitors to restore their embodied self, following psychoanalytical theories such as the Lacanian *mirror stage*. This phenomenon exceeds the scope of this research, but may be an interesting topic for future study.

¹⁰⁰ Loh, *Mediating the Museum Experience*, 18-19.

hereby takes precedence over communicative motivations.¹⁰¹ Many interviewees accordingly perceived picture-taking as a means to make their experience more palpable, whereby the resulting photographs are a tangible memento that allows them to hold onto and cherish their experience long beyond their museum visit. In concordance with this sentiment, Lara (fig. 23) stated her reason for “capturing snippets” of her experience was to cement and immortalize them. Taking pictures allowed her to actualize the immateriality and transient nature of the light projections at the Nxt. Interviewee Clara (fig. 24) took this memorial function even further. She was motivated to take pictures for Instagram because of the beautiful aesthetics of the artwork *Foreign Nature*, but it was simultaneously a means of taking the artwork home with her, thus in a sense making the work her own: “[...] like anyone, I wanted to keep a piece of [the artwork] with me.”

Arden (fig. 13) took pictures and videos of herself in the installation *nu radio World Tour*, to remember her experience better, recounting that while taking a picture she felt more connected with the artwork and that she felt the experience more immediate than without her phone. While this may seem illogical—seeing that both the smartphone and the artworks at the Nxt have been established as following the logic of hypermediacy—Bolter and Grusin’s double logic of remediation also concludes that immediacy may be achieved through the erasure of any apparent forms of mediation by the very features of a hypermediated device or environment. Immediacy through the erasure of hypermediacy, according to the authors, is made possible through the transparency of the given medium, allowing its users to see through it, no longer noticing the medium itself and instead engaging “in an immediate relationship to the contents of that medium.”¹⁰² The design features of contemporary smartphones align with this quest for immediacy: they are more weightless, and effortless to use, and screens are becoming larger, devoid of any buttons that could disrupt the full-screen viewing experience.¹⁰³ This material aesthetics of immediacy allows the interface itself to practically dissolve, making way for a

¹⁰¹ Loh, *Mediating the Museum Experience*, 19.

¹⁰² Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, 24.

¹⁰³ The design of graphic user interfaces of handheld devices is progressively *interfaceless*, through minimal add-ons in the interface design that minimize distractions to naturalize interaction. This can be seen as a pursuit of immediacy *within* hypermediation. Monteiro further outlines this as a contemporary fetishization of the unified, uninterrupted full-screen surface to which images have to adapt, at the cost of their formal aspects (360).

seemingly unmediated experience and interaction with one's surroundings, despite looking through the phone.¹⁰⁴

Furthermore, the act of taking pictures—or rather posing for a picture—for many participants, allowed them to feel the artwork more immediately. Interviewee Henry (fig. 10), whose Instagram post is a vertically framed, full-body image of him standing on a pink bubble in *nu radio World Tour*, and looking to the ground, states:

“My intention or motivation for the picture was that I was lost in a world full of fantasy, a world made of AI, and I always dream of entering a fantasy world full of colors. While taking the pictures it was amazing, as I was in the art itself. I dived into the art and felt like I lived there.”

For Henry, having his picture taken made him feel a part of the artwork, as though he was living in an extraterrestrial, artificial world created by the colorful projections. Taking pictures allowed him to lose himself in the moment, to feel the artwork *more immediately*, and to freeze this transient point in time. The intense connection and emotional resonance he felt with the artwork during the moment of taking the picture subsided once he left. The picture, for Henry, became a testament to the immediacy—both phenomenological and psychological—of his experience. Indeed the self, the body, and one's surroundings in a photograph are all rendered in pixels, reflecting the same light. A distinction between body and background, on the mechanical level of the picture is, therefore, less evident, reflecting the feeling of delving into and becoming one with the art.

The desire for immediacy of the experience is also expressed via the visual aesthetics and editing of participants' Instagram posts *after* their museum visit. Moreover, seeing that for many their picture became a concrete testament to their experience, posting a photograph of themselves on Instagram conveys the immediacy of their experience at the Nxt to their followers; showing that they have been there in person. Looking at the collected images, it becomes apparent that the

¹⁰⁴ Media studies scholar Lori Emerson criticizes the ‘naturalization’ and perceived ‘invisibility’ user interface design strives for (Emerson, 2014). Moreover, Emerson argues that the seamlessness of interfaces may efface users' ability to practice agency, choice and creativity in their interactions with technology, blackboxing software/hardware to the point that users are rendered mere consumers, instead of co-producers of culture. Due to the scope of this research this critique cannot be fully integrated into the study, but should be considered in future discussions about the topic.

pictures have undergone minimal editing, or otherwise editing that is not visible as such. This suggests that participants wanted to photographically represent their experience *as it was*, allowing whoever sees their post to instantly grasp the aesthetic and spatial qualities of the artworks portrayed, without mediation. Contrastingly, but to the same end, interviewee Clara (fig. 24) edited out a door in her Instagram post, which amplifies the effect of full, immediate engulfment in the dreamy world of *Foreign Nature*. Clara stated that she edited out the door to impart to her followers the same feeling she had: being completely surrounded by the light and colors, and feeling as though she was disappearing into the artwork. When comparing the first picture to Clara's second photograph that includes the door, the contrast is striking: once the door is removed, the photograph seems as though the space is never ending, thus more immediate.

Similarly to Clara's post, many participants are seen to be standing or sitting alone in one of the two projection rooms, gazing not directly at the camera but into the three-dimensional space of the installations, as if no one else was with them. The observer may momentarily forget the presence of other people in the museum, not least the photographer themselves. In *nu radio World Tour* for instance, several participants' Instagram posts picture them head-on, sitting parallel to the length of the canvas at the back of the room, as seen in Ayla (fig. 7), Arden (fig. 13), Bennet (fig. 9) and Sophie's posts (fig. 25). Likewise, in *Foreign Nature*, Ezra (fig. 26), Max (fig. 19) and Chloe (fig. 27) are portrayed standing or sitting alone in the vastness of the space, their faces turned away from the camera to showcase their full immersion in the artwork. What almost all posts have in common is the elimination of the edge of the space; their posts make it seem as though the artwork around them was expanding infinitely, as the confines of the room—such as doors, ceilings, or the benches in the back of both spaces—are not pictured.

The Nxt experience, when rendered photographically on Instagram, is thus a partial fabrication done through posing, cropping, and editing in the post-visit stage of the museum visit. Moreover, Instagram posts constitute a selection of images and videos in which the original visitors' perspective is superimposed upon the actual space of the installation. The museum and artwork are decontextualized, separated from their immediate experience as perceived by the visitor: through a self-representational photograph within the space of the museum, the visitors' experience is frozen, cut, and pasted into an entirely different format that fills the screen of their smartphone. In trying to communicate the immediacy felt between artwork and visitor in the hypermediated environment of the Nxt museum, visitors resort to practices and aesthetics of

hypermediacy; erasing the latter to achieve the former. In this act of remediation, immediacy and hypermediacy coincide once more. In short, the act of posting an image of oneself on social media encloses within it the double logic of immediacy and hypermediacy: the conventions of the Instagram app, the layers that are added to the image through editing, captions, filters, and geotags, constitute an inherently hypermediated practice. The image itself, on the other hand, is posted with the purpose of portraying immediacy, or rather a *retroactive* immediacy of having experienced the artwork in an unmediated, transparent way. In this sense, the post-visitation stage of the museum experience is just as important to the experience as having seen the artwork live, as it offers a means to reflect on, make sense of and remember its specificities.

Thus far, this research has demonstrated that the heterotopic, hypermediated environment at the Nxt Museum invokes profound embodied and affective experiences, as well as emotional resonance in its visitors, as exhibited in the first chapter. This chapter, outlined more closely the habitual and naturalized use of smartphones as photographic tools within the artworks at the Nxt, situating it within the double logic of remediation. More specifically, this chapter ascertained the ways in which smartphone usage may disrupt the spatial logic of immersive installations, whilst simultaneously allowing for more immediate experiences of the art when conceived of as an extension of the self.

IV. Negotiating Presence in Digitally Mediated Art Experiences at The Nxt Museum

In answering the question of the ways in which smartphones affect, guide and restructure visitors' engagement in inherently hypermediated environments in *UFO – Unidentified Fluid Other*, this last chapter outlines the ways in which visitors' *presence* may be (re)negotiated. While perhaps counterintuitively, the smartphone—when established as an extension of the self—might aid in making the art experience more immediate, thus arguably more *present*, for museum visitors. Nonetheless, the interviews also reveal that smartphone usage within the gallery space may significantly impact the ways in which visitors direct their attention within the installations, starting with the limited perspective offered of the artwork when looked at through the screen. Interviewee Marvin became very aware of the limitations of smartphone photography, when he tried capturing the artwork *Foreign Nature* through his phone. He recalls the ways in which he moved through the artwork while trying to get the perfect shot:

“I changed my movement for sure because I have to look for [...] the right perspective that could be closer to the way I was thinking of presenting what I was seeing for other people. For example, if I'm in one of the big installations, [the phone is] just a vertical view of the center, that's like a little percentage of the whole experience. If I take a horizontal video that's a different vibe [...]. So also the capacity of the phone, of getting pictures and videos, changed the movements that I made in order to capture the right perspective.”

Marvin's statement epitomizes the limitations of the smartphone's capacities and how the orientation of the camera impacts the perspective one captures of the experience. Bolter and Grusin affirm this notion in their reflection on the attempted immediacy and transparency of computer screens: “Ideally, there should be no difference between the experience of seeing a painting in person and on the computer screen, but this is never so. The computer always intervenes and makes its presence felt in some way [...].”¹⁰⁵ The computer screen can be substituted by the smartphone screen, seeing that the latter is, in essence, a compression of the former into a hand-held device. While visitors yearn for transparency and immediacy, the

¹⁰⁵ Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, 45-46.

smartphone still makes itself felt in minute, yet nuanced ways during an experience, much to the hesitancy of cultural institutions and their representatives.¹⁰⁶

The director and founder of the Nxt Museum, Merel van Helsdingen, when asked about her thoughts on visitors' social media and photography behaviors in her museum, discloses that the displayed art was never meant as the photographic backgrounds many visitors seem to use them for.¹⁰⁷ Quite the opposite, according to the museum's founder the immersive installations are intended to be spaces of contemplation and reflection for the visitor; an otherworldly environment that makes you put your phone away for a while. She sees the Instagram hype of Nxt critically, particularly from the perspective of the artists displayed in *UFO*, whose work is repeatedly appropriated photographically by private individuals and their social media habits. This ethical gray zone of art appropriation through photography becomes even more apparent at the hands of global brands, celebrities, or influencers, who regularly contact van Helsdingen and her team to shoot content in the museum.¹⁰⁸

What remains pertinent about van Helsdingen's reflections is the hesitancy cultural institutions and their employees might have when faced with smartphone photography in the museum space. To evade the possible negative outcomes thereof, after a trial opening of the Nxt Museum, van Helsdingen conducted a survey in which 73% of visitors stated they would be interested in a phone-free ticket time slot at the museum. When implemented, however, hardly any tickets were sold for these unmediated experiences. Clearly, smartphones and their photography function have become an enduring component of the contemporary art experience that visitors do not want to give up.

i. 'Letting Yourself Go:' Being Present in the Art Experience

In order to better grasp how phones might intercept or alter visitors' attention within an experience, the following subchapter closely analyzes the ways in which photographic behavior

¹⁰⁶ For many years, most art galleries and museums were dictated by strict 'no-photography' rules, which only started changing drastically in the last two decades (Miranda, 2013). Institutional concerns about mobile and digital photography are related to artworks' copy-right, their conservation and preservation, but also the effects of incessant photography on other visitors, as well as the experience of the photo-taking visitors themselves (Judkis, 2016).

¹⁰⁷ These statements were extracted from a private conversation of the author with Merel van Helsdingen, who read and approved the ensuing statements before publication.

¹⁰⁸ Due to the scope of this research, the ethical implications of smartphone photography within the gallery space cannot be elaborated on further, but should be subjected to future research. For a more elaborate study of the ethical implications social media usage has for museums and cultural institutions see Wong (2011).

affects visitors' *presence* in the artworks, which according to the museum's founder is necessary to grasp its meaning and content. This may aid in better grasping how phones might intercept and alter visitors' attention within their experiences. As previously stated, picture-taking provoked joy for many interviewees. Nonetheless, a clear majority of participants reported that they consciously took time to enjoy the art *without* their phones.¹⁰⁹ Hereby, many participants stated that during their visit they silenced their phones, turned off notifications, or otherwise only used their phones' camera function. These two patterns in visitors' behavior delineate the smartphone as a possible distraction from actively experiencing the art.

Biswas, in his explication of the dialogic relationship between artwork and viewer, designates art as a "self-expressive autonomy"; having a life of its own and instilling certain feelings, interpretations, and experiences in its viewers.¹¹⁰ The artwork therefore demands to be seen and experienced in an unmediated way: it requires the physical and more importantly *mental* presence of its viewer. Broadly speaking, presence is defined as being in the 'here and now,' immediate and attentive.¹¹¹ The notion of presence is thus necessarily spatially and temporally bound. Gumbrecht, for instance, outlines presence in events primarily in physical, material terms: "Presence is subjected corporeally to spatial circumstances such as bodily proximity, connectivities, and density [...]."¹¹² If presence is conceived of only in corporeal terms, then the smartphone as an extension of the self can be a means to connect with the space of the artwork in manifold ways. The interviews, however, quickly yielded that presence as a concept far surpasses physical proximity to the artwork. In order to better discern the subtleties of presence—beyond embodiment—participants were asked what being present in a given moment means to them *personally*. Several themes materialized in their accounts.

For most participants, being present means "being in the moment": an active realization of your surroundings by focusing your attention on what you see and feel, and keeping an open mind toward what is happening in front of you. Furthermore, participants highlighted the importance of "taking your time" during the experience, allowing for the art to affect you, and to connect with your surroundings in various and unexpected ways. Interviewee Ayla for instance defines presence in an art experience as the attempt to find meaning in the artwork, which can be

¹⁰⁹ Even those visitors who came to the museum primarily to take pictures for social media stated that they actively took time to experience the art *without* being on their phones.

¹¹⁰ Biswas, *Art as Dialogue*, 37-38.

¹¹¹ Merriam-Webster, "Present."

¹¹² Gumbrecht quoted in Pløger, "Presence-Experiences," 860.

done by reading the explanatory texts in the museum. Arden, on the other hand, defines presence as follows:

“Fully present would mean first acknowledging that you are having that experience and then kind of forgetting everything else while in that experience and letting your thoughts not focus on anything specific and trying to grasp what emotions you are feeling at that moment.”

Arden’s definition of presence points to a transcendence of any reality outside of the current experience, a sentiment that many interviewees shared with her.

Similarly, participants recounted a loss of the sense of time and space outside of the experience they were having, and instead being fully immersed in the time and space of the artwork itself. Emma, for instance, elaborates on her feeling of presence in *Foreign Nature*:

“[...] It kind of feels like you’re entering another dimension. As in you’re just not present at the moment. You’re just somewhere completely else. It’s overwhelming with good feelings and amazement.”

By “not present at the moment,” Emma insinuates a loss of self through the loss of connection to the world outside of the artwork. This loss of self parallels the loss of the interviewee’s sense of embodiment, caused by the darkness and light-saturation of the projection rooms. The loss of self thus extends from the corporeal into the psychological realm when becoming truly present in an art experience. Felix, for instance, compares being present to a trance, wherein you are engulfed in a world of your own thoughts and sensations:

“I’d say being fully present in the experience is some kind of trance, where you *take in* all that you *see* and *hear* and *feel* and don’t really realize the other people in the room with you. It’s only *you, in your own world* filled with the art around you.”¹¹³

¹¹³ Emphasis added.

Henry similarly describes being fully present as a suspension of time, where you intensely engage with the artwork by letting it resonate with you emotionally and physically.

The participants' definitions of presence are fundamentally subjective and particular to the context of their respective museum visits. In discussing the spatiotemporal conditions of presence, Pløger points out that this situatedness of experience, combined with the subjectivity of the beholder, negates the possibility of 'pure' or 'absolute' presence.¹¹⁴ Indeed, an affective approach to the matter bears similar outcomes: conceiving of the art experience as the retroactive registration of physically absorbed stimuli and intensities into cognition—what Massumi calls the *missing half-second*—any attempts to produce a concept of presence as *presence in the here and now* are voided by the interval it takes for an individual to fathom the intricacies of their experience.¹¹⁵ It would thus be more useful to speak of an *affective* presence in the here and now, in which the intensities of registered and unregistered affects impinging upon the body—whether only partially or fully registered cognitively—are embedded in the incipience of the art experience. Such a complex theorization of experience was ineffable for most participants, who instead described this continuous registration of stimuli as otherworldly, fantastic, or surreal. An affective theorization of presence would thus explain Felix's trance-like state or Emma's overwhelming feeling of being in an entirely different dimension: they enter the realm of affects.

In further defining this affective presence I want to highlight Nora's (fig. 28) experience, who engaged passionately with this concept. Nora took her Instagram picture in one of the darkened hallways between the main artworks, in which viewers are faced with a large screen projecting the exhibition's virtual guide *Viatrix*. She remembered her visit vividly, recalling the artworks and the *Viatrix* character itself in great detail. For her, being present means putting away her phone, as she associates phone-usage with being present *for other people*, but not for the moment. Instead, she insisted that being present entails turning off your phone, noticing the details of an artwork, listening to her bodily sensations, and returning to these moments by and by:

“Being present is not necessarily reading through texts on the side [of the artwork], but that you repeat the moment, again and again. That you look at it

¹¹⁴ Pløger, “Presence-Experiences,” 860.

¹¹⁵ Massumi, “Autonomy of Affect,” 90.

again and then maybe look at the background, noticing the facets. That, to me, is being present, that *you get into it*, and can still remember it now.”¹¹⁶

The interview was conducted in Nora and my native language German. When returning to translate the interview, I noticed a core phrase of Nora’s definition of presence in front of an artwork: “*sich auf die Erfahrung einlassen*.” Literally translated, this phrase might mean “getting involved in” or “mixed up in” an experience, yet this comes at the cost of a nuance that cannot be conveyed easily in English.¹¹⁷ *Sich einlassen* signifies not an ‘opening up’ to an experience that other interviewees described as ‘open-mindedness.’ Instead, *sich einlassen* implies a dissolution of the self; letting yourself slip and soften into the crevices of an experience; a coalescence of body and mind with its surroundings. Instead of absorbing stimuli of an experience, opening up the embodied self to be affected by impingements, *sich einlassen* suggests an inward motion, a succumbing or complete surrender to an experience, whereby the self becomes infolded within it. In this sense, *sich einlassen* also indicates a loss of control; a letting go of learned ways of existence, a letting *yourself* go. This would also explain why several participants perceived a loss of their sense of time during their experience: they completely surrendered to it.

The notion of coalescing with an experience, following *sich einlassen*, might be more fitting for circumscribing what it means to be both physically and mentally present in the affective realm of the installations at the Nxt. As outlined earlier, interviewees felt both a physical and mental dissolution during their encounters with *Foreign Nature* and *nu radio World Tour*: a sense of floating, a loss of orientation in the continuously changing light projections, and an entry into another dimension. Boundaries between the artwork and its viewer become fluid. Traversing between the real and virtual realms becomes, in the words of the Nxt, a matter of “shape-shifting” between worlds.¹¹⁸ Being present, in the experience then, based on the participants’ accounts and the conceptualization of *sich einlassen*, directly parallels the central tenet and homonymous title of the exhibition wherein the visitor is in another state of being, of

¹¹⁶ All of Nora’s quotes have been translated from German by the author.

¹¹⁷ Words retain semantic nuances that problematize particularly the translation of abstract concepts from one language into another, which is the case for the concept *sich einlassen*. In order to best resolve this issue, the translator must always specify the context of the translated and original texts, which I have tried to do here to the best of my abilities. For a more comprehensive overview of the challenges faced in intralingual and intersemiotic translation see Bassnett (2014).

¹¹⁸ Nxt Museum, “Unidentified Fluid Other.”

perceiving and melding with their surroundings, of becoming fluid and othered: they themselves are the *Unidentified Fluid Other*.

Returning to Nora's experience, her notion of presence as phone-free coalescence with the art directly opposes her picture-taking habits. Nora herself recognized this conundrum, exhibiting a distinct dissonance with her albeit somewhat idealistic idea of *sich einlassen* and the concurrent urge to take pictures and share them on Instagram. She expressed that she felt somewhat enslaved to consumerist tendencies and deep-seated urges to share and present oneself as having great experiences on the social media app. Moreover, Nora ponders:

“Taking pictures in art exhibitions feels forbidden to me [...]. Like I said, you're supposed to just enjoy the moment [...] and then we're taking pictures again. That's the double morale of the contemporary Neanderthal. Everyone has that, and it's also not ethically reprehensible to pull out your phone because you have such an urge to communicate and be noticed nowadays...”

This *double morale* of wanting to 'be in the moment' whilst simultaneously feeling the need to connect with others by sharing extraordinary experiences via Instagram deeply resonated with many other interviewees. This cognitive dissonance suggests a subconscious awareness of the hindrance smartphones and mobile photography may pose in being fully present in an experience. Lara (fig. 23) for instance states that for her being present means putting her phone away and having her mind fully immersed in the moment. Interviewee Ayla, on the other hand, stated: “I don't think being present has that much to do with a phone, although being on your phone the whole time will definitely stop you from being present.” There thus seems to be a strong sense of ambivalence surrounding smartphone photography in the art experience, also tracing back to visitors' motivations to visit the Nxt. Whereas some visitors, like Hannah (fig. 29), Francesca (fig. 20), and Emma (fig. 12), visited the museum primarily to take pictures of themselves in the colorful installations, others made sure to include designated phone-free time during their visit, only pulling their devices out after having experienced the art in an unmediated way. It thus comes to question the extent to which *sich einlassen*, or being affectively present in an experience, happens not despite or without the smartphone but *through* it.

ii. The Dual Presence of Visitors at the Nxt Museum

In the following, I argue that similarly to the double morale of taking pictures in art spaces, visitors' affective presence is bifurcated into two distinct strains thereof, whereby the smartphone restructures visitors' attention, behavior, and intentions within the museum space. Ensuing the reconceptualization of presence as affective, processual, and a psycho-corporeal coalescence with one's surroundings (*sich einlassen*), as opposed to pure and unmediated, the experience of digital, immersive artworks as seen at the Nxt is reformulated in the contemporary, hypermediated world in which (self-representational) photography practices and smartphone usage have become custom to most—if not all—museum visitors. It is hereby important to distinguish between different types of photographic behavior of the visitors, namely taking pictures of the exhibition *yourself* and *having your picture taken* in front of the exhibited artworks by a second party.¹¹⁹ These two modes of photography differ significantly. The former implies a sense of agency and assertion of the visitors' creativity in taking pictures of what they particularly enjoy about an artwork, and is a rather discrete way of capturing one's surroundings. The latter involves more overt posing in front of the camera, whereby the photographic subject has control over their poses and facial expressions, but not over the composition and aesthetic features of the picture.¹²⁰ Previous research on photographic practices in the gallery space has shown that self-representational photography is preferred by visitors when posting their experiences on Instagram, as it enables them to showcase themselves having an experience through interacting with the given space around them.¹²¹ Nonetheless, in gauging the effects of smartphone photography on visitors' presence within the art installations at the Nxt, both modes of picture-taking have been taken into consideration.

As alluded to earlier, presence, for many participants, entailed switching off their phones, or keeping them in their pockets in order to experience the art at the Nxt free of distractions. Interviewee Clara (fig. 24), for instance, believes that true presence is lived in silence and

¹¹⁹ A third photographic behavior that is not expanded on here is the *selfie*, whereby a user takes a picture of themselves using the frontal camera of their phones. While self-representational photography in the contemporary age resembles selfie-taking practices, the number of actual selfies in the collected Instagram posts for this research was negligible, and will therefore not be addressed as a distinct phenomenon in this research. For a more detailed elaboration on the parallels between selfie culture and self-representational photography see Loh (2020).

¹²⁰ While a person can still direct the photographer to take pictures in a certain way, many participants stated that they refrained from elaborate, long processes of picture-taking, so as not to disturb or be potentially judged by other visitors. Instead, pictures were often taken hastily, in moments when nobody else was in the room.

¹²¹ Loh, *Mediating the Museum Experience*, 16.

isolation, turning off your phone, relaxing, and therefore being fully mentally engaged with the artwork:

“[The phone] definitely distracts from the artwork if you’re concentrating or concerned about how YOU look, and not how the [artworks] look. That’s why I like the no-photography rule in some galleries, you learn to experience things better.”

Many participants shared this sentiment, as they found having their picture taken in front of the artwork shifted their focus away from the art and towards concerns of appearance and how they would be perceived by other visitors in the space.¹²² While most participants took time without their phone, taking pictures was nonetheless an activity that they all engaged in. The aforementioned double morale of picture-taking and the simultaneous longing for the immediacy of an experience hereby resonated deeply with other interviewees too. Felix, for instance, states that he felt “shallow” while having his picture taken in front of the artwork, yet proceeded to do so nonetheless because it simultaneously felt enjoyable and natural. He explains:

“When taking pictures like this [at] a museum [...] I can hear this strawman of a boomer in the back of my mind say: ‘Ugh, damn kids, never living in the moment, always needing a picture for social media.’ But I just wanted to do it, it felt right, it felt fun to do it. But to be fair it did kind of ‘kick’ me out of the experience since we looked at the pictures and were kind of focusing on that instead of the exhibition. But in hindsight, it doesn’t feel that bad... It seems like a part of the experience to post about it.”

¹²² Many participants described having their photo taken as awkward, due to the presence of other people in the space. Moreover, they felt they were being “caught” in the perceived narcissistic act of self-representational photography (Loh, 16). Indeed the presence of other people within the gallery space may significantly affect one’s experience, in this case particularly one’s self-perception. Jean-Paul Sartre (1943) describes our own perception of the embodied self as a ‘being-for-itself,’ whereby our awareness of another’s gaze upon us may split this perception into a ‘being-for-others.’ In becoming aware of how we are perceived by others, we ourselves are *othered* into the object of another’s gaze (Sartre, 221). This may in turn contribute to the notions of self-othering already alluded to throughout this thesis, that designates visitors of the Nxt as *unidentified fluid others* themselves. A more in-depth analysis of the effect of other visitors’ presence on individual visitors’ experience is hereby pertinent to better understanding the various ‘othering’ gazes at play, and may be subject to future research.

Nora and Daniela (fig. 30) described similar experiences of having an ‘internal voice’ of an older generation, which disciplined and judged them for posing and taking pictures in the museum. Seeing that all participants were aged between 18 and 30, there might be a generational gap in the perception of smartphone usage and the need to record and share one’s experiences online, seeing that Felix described his disciplining voice as “strawman of a boomer,” referring to the baby boomer generation of the mid-20th century.¹²³

The ubiquity of smartphones in the gallery space posits a presupposed remediation, which directly contrasts the supposed unmediated *aura* of an artwork as proposed by philosopher Walter Benjamin, which defines art as a unique, singular object inherently tied to the specificity of time and place.¹²⁴ I argue that it is precisely this conception of the *aura* and its inherent requisite of the present-ness of the visitor to the work of art, that fuels the internal judgment of visitors while taking pictures and having their picture taken in the museum space. Bolter and Grusin specify that artworks are both necessarily bound to (re)mediation in the contemporary age, and simultaneously pursue the portrayal of a reality freed thereof, reflecting the double morale surrounding picture-taking as expressed by the interviewees above.¹²⁵ Benjamin’s theory may aid in outlining the complexity of the technical medium of photography that the art world is faced with today. Yet, Hansen asserts that the Benjaminian *aura* reaches a dissolution in the digital age, in which we move towards a new aura of the artwork that is wholly rooted in the embodied experience of new media.¹²⁶ In its photographic remediation by means of the smartphone, the *aura* of a (new media) artwork is therefore not lost but always refashioned in whichever medium it is represented through.

What might be at stake in the processes of remediation is not the *aura* of the artwork itself, but the visitors’ sense of self-consciousness, identity, and present-ness to the world, which becomes convoluted whilst taking pictures. The yearning for an *unmediated* relationship with the world, and concurrently the *immediate* experience of life, seem to stand in direct contrast to the *hypermediated* self that is rendered photographically at the *Nxt*.¹²⁷ We require a

¹²³ The baby boomer generation, sometimes shortened to ‘boomers’ by generations thereafter, refers to people born between the years of 1946 and 1964, whereas the generation addressed in this research falls under the categories of Millennials (born between 1981 and 1996) and Generation Z (born between 1997 and 2013).

¹²⁴ Benjamin, *The Work of Art*, 23.

¹²⁵ Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, 75.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 236.

reconceptualization of smartphone photography as *immediate hypermedium*. Roland Barthes, in his seminal work *Camera Lucida*, states about photography:

“The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiation which ultimately touch me, who am here. [...] More than other arts, *photography offers an immediate presence to the world.*”¹²⁸

In this sense, the hypermediated device’s naturalization not only in its material qualities but also in the emanated ‘radiation’ of one body to another through the photograph, becomes a vividly immediate experience. The transience of the visitors’ art experience is eternalized in pixels, the body is embedded in code, thus epitomizing the hypermediated self that has become a contemporary, human condition for many. Subsequently, the continuous remediation of objects in our physical presence negates the need for our conscious, unmediated present-ness in that immediacy is redefined “as being in the presence of media.”¹²⁹ It stands to reason that being affectively mindful and present during an art experience no longer actively excludes media, but inevitably includes them as a precondition of our being in the world.

Following this logic, the collective preconception that smartphone usage may inhibit attention becomes vague, if not entirely redundant, to understanding present-ness in explicating art experience. Negotiating presence in the contemporary art experience as seen in the Nxt is therefore no longer a question of phone usage within the museum space, but the motivation behind said phone usage, which in turn affects the preceding identitarian and self-conscious concerns of visitors. We are faced with a question of *intentionality*. Philosopher Marshall McLuhan stresses the importance of considering *how* a medium is used instead of inherently assuming that the product of technological innovation is that which renders our interaction with the world undesirable.¹³⁰ Therefore, it is not the medium itself—in this case the smartphone—but how it is implemented within the experience, and the intentions behind its use, that determine one’s presence within the space. Hereby, interviewees expressed two intentions for taking pictures of the artworks and self-representational pictures at the Nxt: for memory purposes and to share them on social media. In researching the effects of photo-taking on the enjoyment of an

¹²⁸ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 80-84. Emphasis added.

¹²⁹ Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, 236.

¹³⁰ McLuhan, *Medium is the Message*, 3.

experience, marketing scholars Alixandra Barasch et al. outline a bifurcation between photo-taking as an impediment to one's enjoyment as it shifts attention and thus engagement *away* from the experience, and simultaneously the increased directedness of attention and therefore engagement *towards* scenes captured during photo-taking, which may in turn increase enjoyment of said experience.¹³¹

The intention during the photographic process plays a directing role in the enjoyment of an experience. Barasch et al. contend that if the intention to share pictures is salient *during* the experience, this may decrease the enjoyment of said experience, as it involves the potential to be judged by others and concomitantly evokes concerns of self-presentation.¹³² While Barasch et al. focus on the potential to be judged by others based on the picture that has been shared with a social network, the self-presentational concerns already begin in the museum space itself, while posing for pictures, as outlined in Felix and Nora's experiences. Negative effects of self-consciousness during the picture-taking process become even more apparent in Daniela's reflections: "It was a little bit like, what will people think about you when you take pictures? [...] So it made me feel awkward. But after a while, when you take a lot of pictures, you just don't care anymore." Many participants who shared Daniela's initial awkwardness of having their picture taken with others present in the room also found that they ultimately "got over it," as taking these pictures and thus capturing the memory of their visit took precedence over the potential judgment of others. Most reported that despite this perceived awkwardness while taking pictures, using their smartphones did not impede their enjoyment of the experience.

However, whether or not an art experience is enjoyed remains separate from one's engagement with and present-ness during the experience. Despite the inherent hypermediation and ubiquity of smartphone picture-taking in the *Nxt*, and in public spaces in general, participants exhibited an internalized caution and hesitancy towards smartphone usage. Indeed, certain societal and recreational spaces are designated as phone-free, in favor of an *unmediated* experience, as seen for instance in the cinema or during live performances. Pulling out one's phone in such situations implies a sense of un-attentiveness, of not being present in the moment. Interviewee Nora states aptly:

¹³¹ Barasch et al., "Enjoyment of Experiences," 120.

¹³² Barasch et al., "Intention to Share," 1221.

“Being present means switching [media] off. So I also didn’t have my phone in my hand that much... It is important to put your phone in your pocket. If your phone is in your hand and you get a message from... let’s say Chris [...] then you look at your phone and want to know what Chris wants. That’s not being present in the moment. That’s *being present for others*, but not for yourself [...].”

Marvin feels similarly, describing his habit of reaching for his phone to check messages as a means to escape or distance himself from the situation of the present. Nora and Marvin hereby talk about the connectivity to the outside world that smartphones afford their users, and while it is true that messaging services may temporarily cut through and distract from our attention and engagement with our surroundings, it comes to question whether this is also the case for picture-taking. Indeed, Marvin makes a clear distinction between using his phone to message others and using his phone to take pictures or have his picture taken. He believes that while he is photographing the art, his presence with it *increases*, as he is actively trying to remember its details.

Instead of an impediment, as outlined by Barasch et al., smartphone photography then becomes an added layer to the immediate experience of hypermediated artworks at the Nxt Museum, which in its value remains inherently neutral. Instead of adding or subtracting value to an experience, an analysis of interviewee’s responses has shown that (self-representational) photography fractures the experience into two distinct spheres, and two modes of presence: (1) consciously taking time off the phone to take in the experience, and (2) taking pictures of the art and oneself having the art experience. These are two entirely different ways of interacting with the installations at the Nxt, with specific motivations, purposes, and outcomes for the individuals involved. Moreover, due to the hypermediated environment of the Nxt and the presence in the face of media as explained by Bolter and Grusin, using one’s phone to take a picture establishes an entirely new way of being present in and engaging with the artworks. In this sense, the hypermediacy of the experience becomes authentic in itself, no longer contradicting, but enhancing its immediacy.¹³³

Furthermore, in the case of the aesthetics of hypermediacy of *Foreign Nature* and *nu radio World Tour*, and the heterotopic nature of the museum, it is precisely the excessive

¹³³ Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, 42.

mediation that makes their experience so unique and spectacular, thus heightening their authenticity. Bolter and Grusin elaborate further:

“Hypermedia and transparent media are opposite manifestations of the same desire: the desire to get past the limits of representation and to achieve the real. [...] The real is defined in terms of the viewer’s experience; it is *that which would evoke an immediate (and therefore authentic) emotional response*. [...] digital hypermedia seek the real by multiplying mediation so as to create a feeling of fullness, a *satiety of experience*, which can be taken as reality. [...] With their constant references to other media and their contents, hypermedia ultimately claim our attention as *pure experience*.”¹³⁴

Following this conceptualization of hypermediacy as a fully saturated, pure experience, we can conceive of smartphone photography as a meanwhile natural and even essential part of art experiences, adding to its hypermediacy. Paired with the intentionality behind photographing their experience, taking pictures is, therefore, a new way for visitors to be present with the artwork. Those who visited the museum solely to take pictures for social media indeed found their experience enjoyable and felt present throughout it, some even stating they were more attentive and observant of the art while taking pictures.¹³⁵ Following the feeling of presence as ‘letting yourself go’ or *sich einlassen*, and its implied embodied and cognitive loss of self, taking pictures may allow visitors to reconnect with the self in the particular time and place of the museum. Taking pictures can make the ethereal experience of *sich einlassen* more tangible, a means of regaining consciousness of one’s surroundings and thus resurfacing from the hypermediated world of the artwork into which one had previously plunged. The dual character of visitors’ presence at the Nxt Museum, consisting of conscious time with and without the phone as explicated in this subchapter, thus retains a complementary quality, restoring the balance of a fully satiated, hypermediated art experience.

¹³⁴ Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, 53-54. Emphasis added.

¹³⁵ This becomes particularly evident in Francesca’s (fig. 20) interview who visited the Nxt mainly to take aesthetically pleasing Instagram pictures. Francesca personally defines being present as taking pictures of things that intrigue her and catch her attention. She felt that picture-taking increased her engagement with the artwork: “I was focusing a lot more on how [the artwork] looks, the colors and how it matches my outfit... So I was just more into the art [...]”

V. Limitations and Reflections on Methodology

Before summarizing and concluding on the main findings of this research, this section reflects on the limitations of the guiding ethnographic methodology. Following Crang and Cook, my own position as a researcher bears several possibilities of bias.¹³⁶ There is no such thing as a truly objective or ‘detached’ researcher. Instead ethnographic research is always necessarily saturated with power/knowledge dynamics.¹³⁷ Just as being enveloped by an immersive installation at the Nxt Museum poses an embodied art experience, so is researching itself an embodied activity entangled with the identity and culture of the person conducting the research.¹³⁸

Indeed, the idea for this research sprouts from my personal experiences with hypermediated, immersive installations, and my own affection for the subject matter. I—a female German master’s student—have always had a particular passion for the arts, leading me to study contemporary art and digital media throughout my university education. I am privileged with a certain situated cultural capital that was stimulated from a young age and allows me access to the art world that not everyone has. While this stance may be problematic, I would like to adopt the more optimistic attitude of Crang and Cook, who argue: “Rather than being a source of weakness, the always already positioned and intersubjective nature of ethnography can be seen as a strength out of which more rigorous understandings can be built.”¹³⁹

Acknowledging my own potential biases is a first step in conceiving of my positionality as a strength for this research. Through my work as a content creator and social media assistant I increasingly use my phone to document and share my art experience on both professional and personal social media accounts. Even before professionally and academically engaging with the cultural field, I was often compelled to photograph (or have my photo taken) in art experiences. I personally felt that these practices of (self-representational) photography interfered with my presence to the art experience. I could not seem to focus on the art alone, letting it affect me fully. This is due in part to internalized fallacies of art historical discourses (such as the Benjaminian *aura*) that continue to trickle down into the museum space through curatorial choices, yet it triggered questions of whether other people felt the same as I did, or rather, how

¹³⁶ Crang and Cook, *Doing Ethnographies*, 8.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

others experience picture-taking in art spaces. These personal dispositions and curiosity fuel and strengthen my research.

As for the methodology itself, there are several shortcomings that warrant further elaboration. Doing digital ethnography, through conducting interviews, yielded an almost insurmountable amount of qualitative data, much of which had to be condensed or excluded to accommodate the scope of this research. This research could therefore not consider the social, economic, gendered, and racial/ethnic contexts of the participants, which may have significantly shaped their responses. As this thesis focuses on subjective experience, identity politics could not be considered in evaluating subjects' answers. Moreover, questions that arose from the dataset that could not be answered include, but are not limited to: the ethnic and economic diversity of the participants, which may affect their access to the rather elitist realm of art history; their nationality and native language, and how this may have impacted their understanding of the artworks at *Unidentified Fluid Other* and their intellectual stimulation; and the gendered dynamics of Instagram, given that the majority of participants identified as female. To answer such questions, I suggest that future research of similar nature may foreground these dynamics in a more intersectional, socio-politically sensitive framework.

Furthermore, it would be pertinent for future research to examine experiences of people who did not photograph or share their experiences online. As the artworks at the Nxt were not created with the primary intent to be 'Instagrammable,' investigating the unmediated experience of artworks at the Nxt (without smartphone photography) would offer a direct comparison to the analysis made in this research, which focuses solely on (re)mediated practices. Also concerning the focus and content of this study, future research may investigate more closely the difference between digital photography and digital videography, as quite a few participants included videos of the installations in their respective Instagram posts. Video-taking is hereby a distinct way of engaging with the artworks, as it allows visitors to capture the sound, movement, and vastness of the space. As all participant's posts showcased a static picture first, followed by videos later in their carousels, no distinction was made between the two practices in this research, but should be done in the future.

This thesis embraces the positive and constructive outcomes of social media use in cultural contexts, yet it is crucial to remain critical of the larger societal and economic structures underpinning normalized behaviors such as Instagram photo-sharing. Digital devices and social

networking services are deeply embedded in daily life, conditioning people—both culturally and economically—to continue to use and consume media. Such consumer culture is particularly prominent on Instagram, whereby people can curate the self as a brand that competes for others' attention as currency.¹⁴⁰ The strains of such consumerist and sensationalist tendencies were felt in some of the participants' accounts. The central themes guiding this research thus cannot be uncoupled from the commercial, corporate interests that encourage and spur social media habits, and should be subject to more critical scrutiny in future research.

There are certain choices made in setting up this study that furthermore limited the scope of the research, or otherwise impacted participants' responses. The chosen methodology of structured and semi-structured interviews, for instance, may have affected the verity and elaboration of participants' responses depending on their willingness to share personal information with a stranger. It is noteworthy that more participants agreed to email interviews than Zoom interviews, which significantly differed in their design. Email interviews resembled a questionnaire with eleven fixed questions, whereas Zoom calls only roughly followed this structure, as the open conversation allowed for follow-up questions and in-depth discussions. Email interviews were thus less flexible, and often brought forth rather short and sometimes incomprehensible answers with little possibility for follow-ups.¹⁴¹

To encourage in-depth reflections, the questions asked were open-ended, centering on participants' emotions, thoughts, impulses, and physical sensations. Open-ended questions are furthermore instructive in avoiding suggestive bias. To the best of my ability, I tried to remove suggestive terms with value judgment that may have derived from my own rather negative experiences of smartphone remediation in art experiences. I emphasized the value of the participants' own, honest perspective at the beginning of each interview. In hindsight, however, despite these precautions, suggestive bias might have been unknowingly evoked through the order in which questions were asked. More specifically, asking questions about the visitors' respective phone usage in the museum space may have inclined them to pre-emptively assume that the question of 'presence' was inherently linked to being either with or without the phone. Retrospectively, the question of what presence means to the interviewees and whether they felt

¹⁴⁰ See also Laeder (2018).

¹⁴¹ See Crang and Cook (2007) for a more detailed discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of various interview strategies and approaches.

present during their experience should have been asked first, followed up by a closer discussion of their phone usage and its effects on their engagement with the experience.

Lastly, there is much to be said about how representative and transferable the findings of this research are in the broader cultural field and population at large. Since only 25 of over 100 potential interviewees completed their participation in this research, there is a possibility of non-response bias. Moreover, participants in this research might have certain inclinations towards arts and culture, or smartphone photography, that is not shared by, and is thus not representative of general societal trends. Nonetheless, this research has given a glimpse into the minds of people *living* and *experiencing* unique phenomena in contemporary art and new media as they are happening. If given more time and resources this type of study may become more representative, thus bearing much potential for understanding the lived experience of art and museums through the perspective of digital humanities.

VI. Conclusion

The leading objective and concurrent value of this research remains its ethnographic departure from lived experience, investigating not what art *represents* intellectually and interpretatively, but what art *does* to visitors both viscerally and emotionally. Guided by the question of how smartphone usage in hypermediated art installations at the Nxt Museum reshapes and restructures visitors' presence and engagement in the art experience, this study followed the hypotheses that new media art environments as seen at the Nxt may invoke profound, embodied experiences that are decisively guided by the use of self-representational smartphone photography in the art encounter.

The Instagram popularity of the Nxt reconfigures the contemporary museum visitor as a smartphone user, whereby this device poses an additional trajectory in the symbiogenic and relational dialogue between new media artwork, viewer, institution, and art critic. The two primary case studies *Foreign Nature* by Julius Horsthuis and *nu radio World Tour* by Oseanworld follow an aesthetics of hypermediation that makes them particularly alluring for visitors to photograph and post on Instagram, designating the institution itself as heterotopic space. The three-dimensional, immersive spatial qualities and the hypermediation of light projections originating in algorithms constitute a spectacular and unique environment that sets the Nxt apart from 'traditional' art museums, designating it instead as a contemporary heterotopia. The novelty of the two artworks evoked profoundly ambivalent and intense emotional and physical resonances within its visitors, who felt they were made both more and less aware of their embodied selves within the space.

Enmeshed within the affective sensations of visitors was their impulse to photographically document themselves having such wondrous art experiences. These practices follow the double logic of remediation, which is suspended between a desire for immediacy and an appreciation for hypermediacy. Where smartphone remediation within gallery spaces might be viewed critically by institutions, visitors' reflections showcase the enjoyment they harness from digital photography, opening up new ways for them to be receptive to and engage with the displayed artworks. While smartphones may cut through the spatial logic of the installations, the phone as an inherently hypermediated device might allow for more immediate experiences of one's surroundings when considered as an extension of the mental and physical faculties of its

user. Moreover, many participants who primarily used picture-taking as a memory-aid, perceived that smartphone photography came naturally to them during their visit, particularly in a space that is already digitally mediated. This effect is amplified by the increasing naturalization (the ‘making invisible’) of graphic user interfaces.

In a sense, the merging of human and machine implied in the smartphone as an extension of the self mirrors posthuman conceptualizations that undo the duality of the human body and cybernetics and instead create a field of embodied affect and emergence. The proposed merging of digital and physical worlds that is suggested in the exhibition *Unidentified Fluid Other* is thus already in progress, if not in place altogether: the phone constitutes a digital space that might measure only as big as its screen, but opens up a window into a new realm of possibilities to connect with and be affected by others and one’s surroundings. The new cybernetic body in a hypermediated environment is thus no longer a futuristic theory but has been actualized in visitors of the Nxt Museum, clad with smartphones in hand, creating an amalgamation that becomes a complex site of potentiality for art to affect them. To all appearances, the exhibition title *Unidentified Fluid Other* directly aligns with visitors’ experiences: the visitor too, by the sheer act of taking pictures, has become fluid and othered. The need to be ‘fully present’ in an experience, likened by participants and institutions alike to a near total disconnection from digital technologies is hereby voided, replaced instead by an *affective* presence that is registered retroactively. This research has shown that instead of an outward presence to the world (i.e. being present *physically*, through directed consciousness and attention), presence may function inwardly, by means of letting yourself go into (*sich einlassen*) the art experience, and surrendering to what it may entail, including the impulses to photograph it.

Nonetheless, the participants’ cognitive dissonance about their smartphone usage and habitual photo-taking points to a dual quality of presence in the contemporary realm marked by a double morale of longing for immediacy and the simultaneous urge to engage hypermediated devices during the experience. In this sense, instead of disrupting visitors’ presence in the art experience, smartphones’ photographic uses in the museum space can be designated as an additional trajectory in the museum experience that renegotiates visitors’ engagement therein. Taking pictures can thus be reconceptualized as a new means for visitors to immerse themselves and connect with their surroundings, as many participants felt particularly connected to the art

while having their picture taken; a moment which seemingly extended their museum visit infinitely.

It has become ostensibly clear that smartphone usage in art experiences is becoming a standard practice added to the routine of museum visits, just as buying tickets or reading exhibition texts. The institutions whom this affects have yet to fully embrace and adapt to the implications of these developments. Rather than projecting merely outward, towards its visitors, the *unidentified fluid other-ness* of the Nxt Museum may also inform curatorial and cultural practices at large by accommodating the nuanced and complex ways in which people connect with, learn, and understand contemporary art in the digital realm, many of which now include smartphone photography. There seems to be an urgent need for such fluidity—or flexibility—in cultural institutions, replacing their authoritative educational role with non-teleological approaches to the production and dissemination of knowledge. The Nxt Museum is hereby exemplary, as it encourages visitors' freedom of expression in the gallery space by emboldening them to move through the space without restrictions and engage creatively with artworks through capturing and posting their art experiences on social media.

In the continuous quest to democratize the still somewhat inaccessible circles of art history and cultural heritage that inform and endorse museum practices, this study contributes an alternative to the traditions of academic and applied art history. Although the complexity of the theories used here may seem counterintuitive, the conclusions drawn from this visitor-centered, transdisciplinary phenomenology of new media art experiences may encourage scholars and professionals alike to look beyond representational and interpretive research in art, to how it can engage, affect and resonate with broad audiences in a wholly embodied manner. While this thesis was limited to one case study and the specific genre of new media art installations, future research may further investigate the ways in which principles of remediation affectively impact visitors' presence and engagement in other media and art historical movements. Listening to accounts of lived experience illustrates the manifold ways in which museum visitors may grasp and engage with art—whether that is through reading the accompanying texts of artworks on the walls, taking pictures on their phones, or simply taking the time to be present with and surrender to whatever their experience may be. Hopefully, this study may inspire researchers and professionals alike not to discard subjective experience too quickly, instead seeing embodiment and affective awareness as an alternative locus for art historical knowledge to flourish.

VII. Images

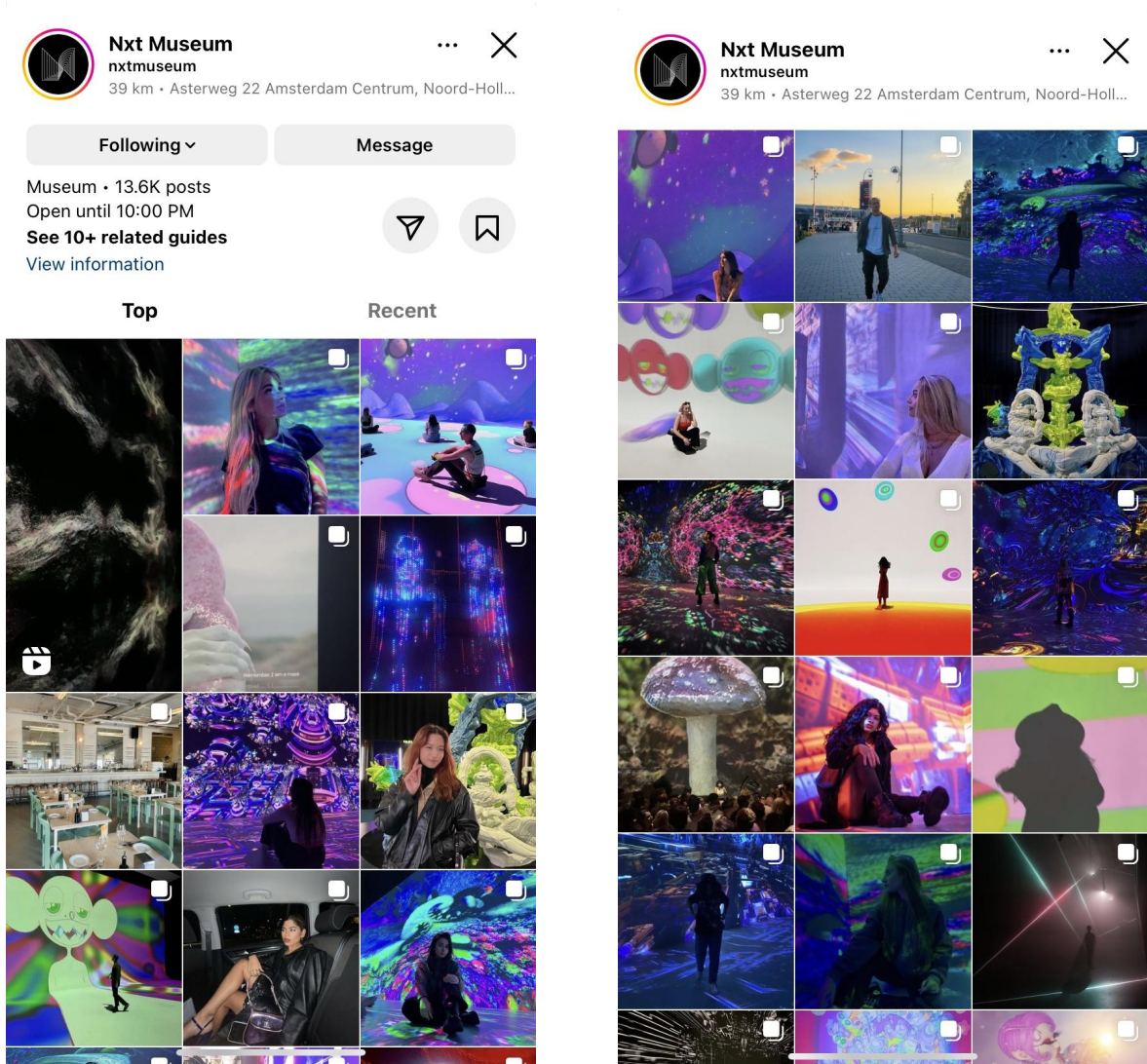


Fig. 1: Geotag “Nxt Museum, Amsterdam” on *Instagram*. Screenshots taken by the author. January 28, 2023.



Fig. 2: Oseanworld, *nu radio World Tour*, 2022, interactive installation of light and sound (Amsterdam: Nxt Museum).

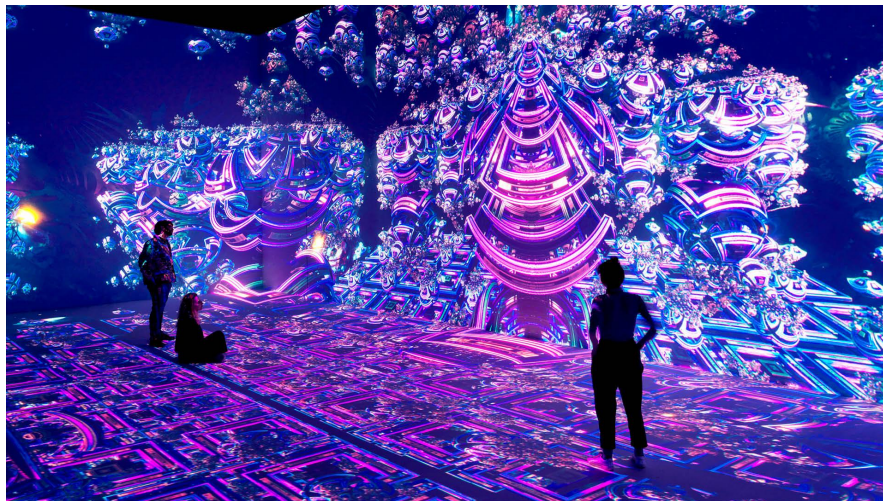


Fig. 3: Julius Horsthuis, *Foreign Nature*, 2022, interactive installation of light and sound, (Amsterdam: Nxt Museum).



Fig. 4: Collage of total Instagram posts with the geotag “Nxt Museum, Amsterdam” collected. Screenshot taken by the author. January 28, 2023.

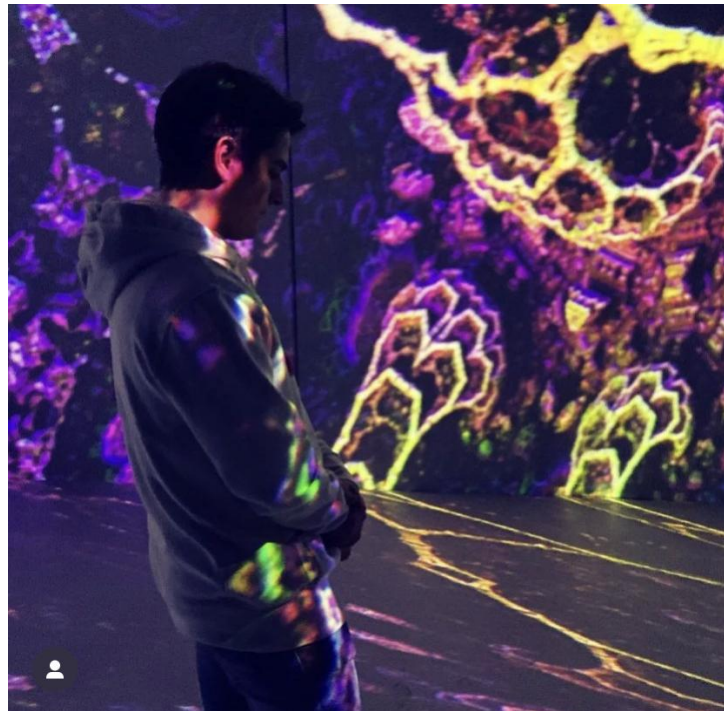


Fig. 5: Felix's Instagram post in Julius Horsthuis' *Foreign Nature*.

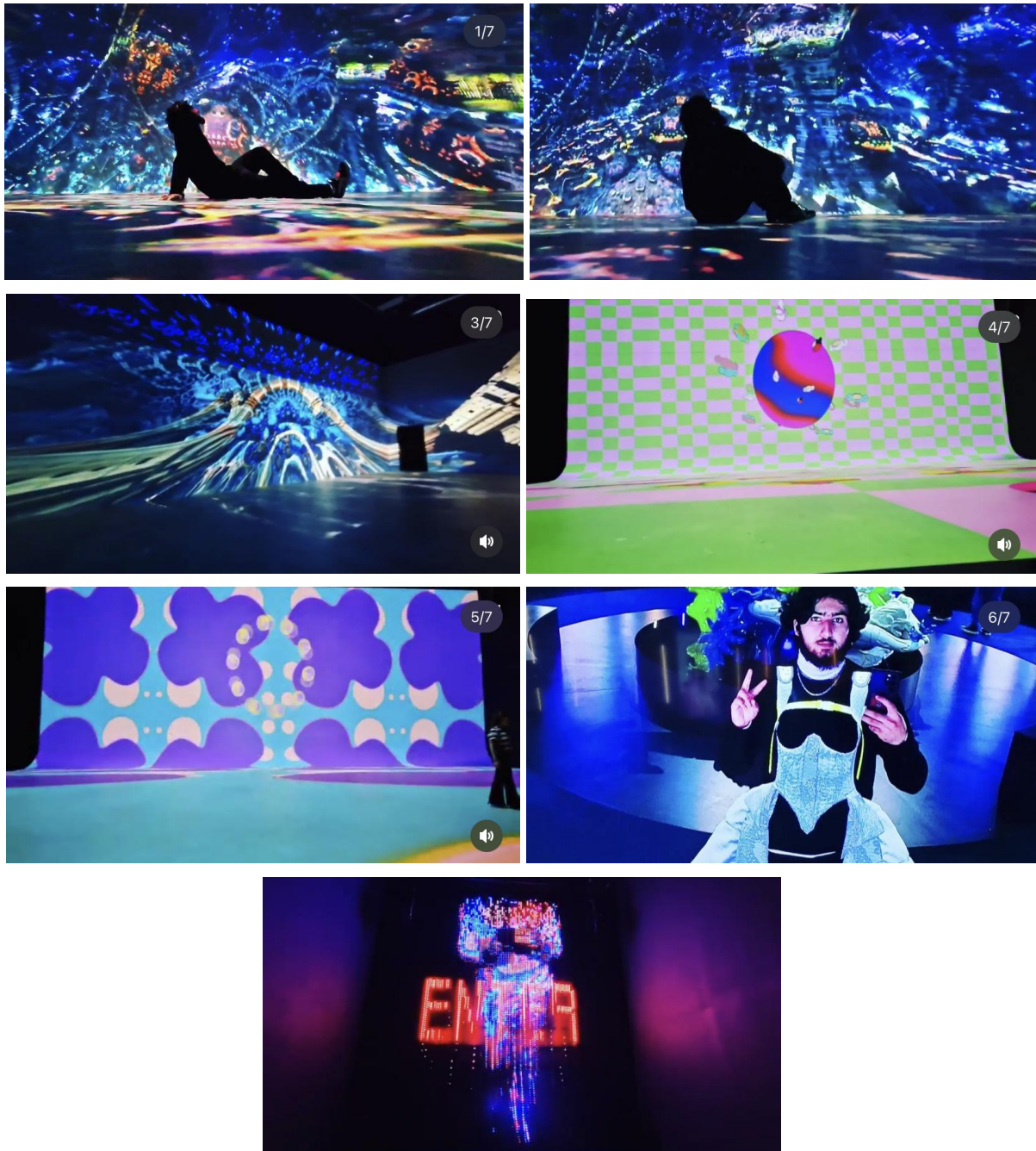


Fig. 6: Colin's Instagram post with pictures and videos of Julius Horsthuis' *Foreign Nature*, Oseanworld's *nu radio World Tour*, The Fabricant's *WHOLELAND*, and Ksawery Kirklweski's *ENTER*.



Fig. 7: The first picture of Ayla’s Instagram post with Oseanworld’s *nu radio World Tour*.



Fig. 8: Nick and Phoebe's pictures from their visit to the Nxt (not posted on Instagram) with The Fabricant's *WHOLELAND*, Lu Yang's *Great Adventure for Material World*, Ksawery Kirklweski's *ENTER* and Julius Horsthuis' *Foreign Nature*.



Fig. 9: Bennet's Instagram post with Julius Horsthuis' *Foreign Nature* and Oseanworld's *nu radio World Tour*.



Fig. 10: Henry's Instagram post with Oseanworld's *nu radio World Tour*.



Fig. 11: Mia's Instagram post in Julius Horsthuis' *Foreign Nature*.

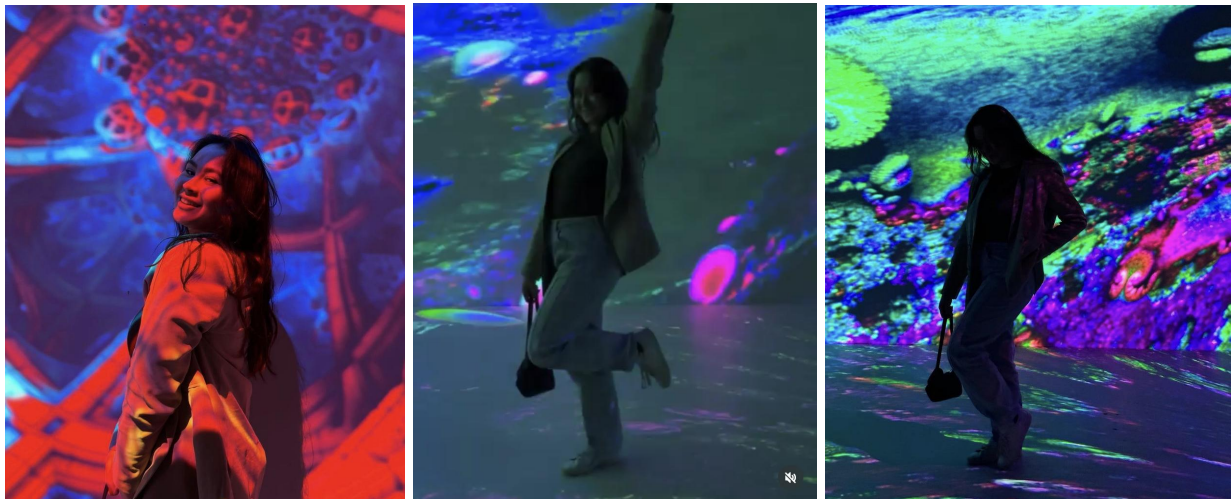


Fig. 12: Emma's Instagram post with pictures and videos in Julius Horsthuis' *Foreign Nature*.



Fig. 13: Arden’s Instagram post with a picture and video in Oseanworld’s *nu radio World Tour*.



Fig. 14: Tara’s Instagram post in Julius Horsthuis’ *Foreign Nature*.

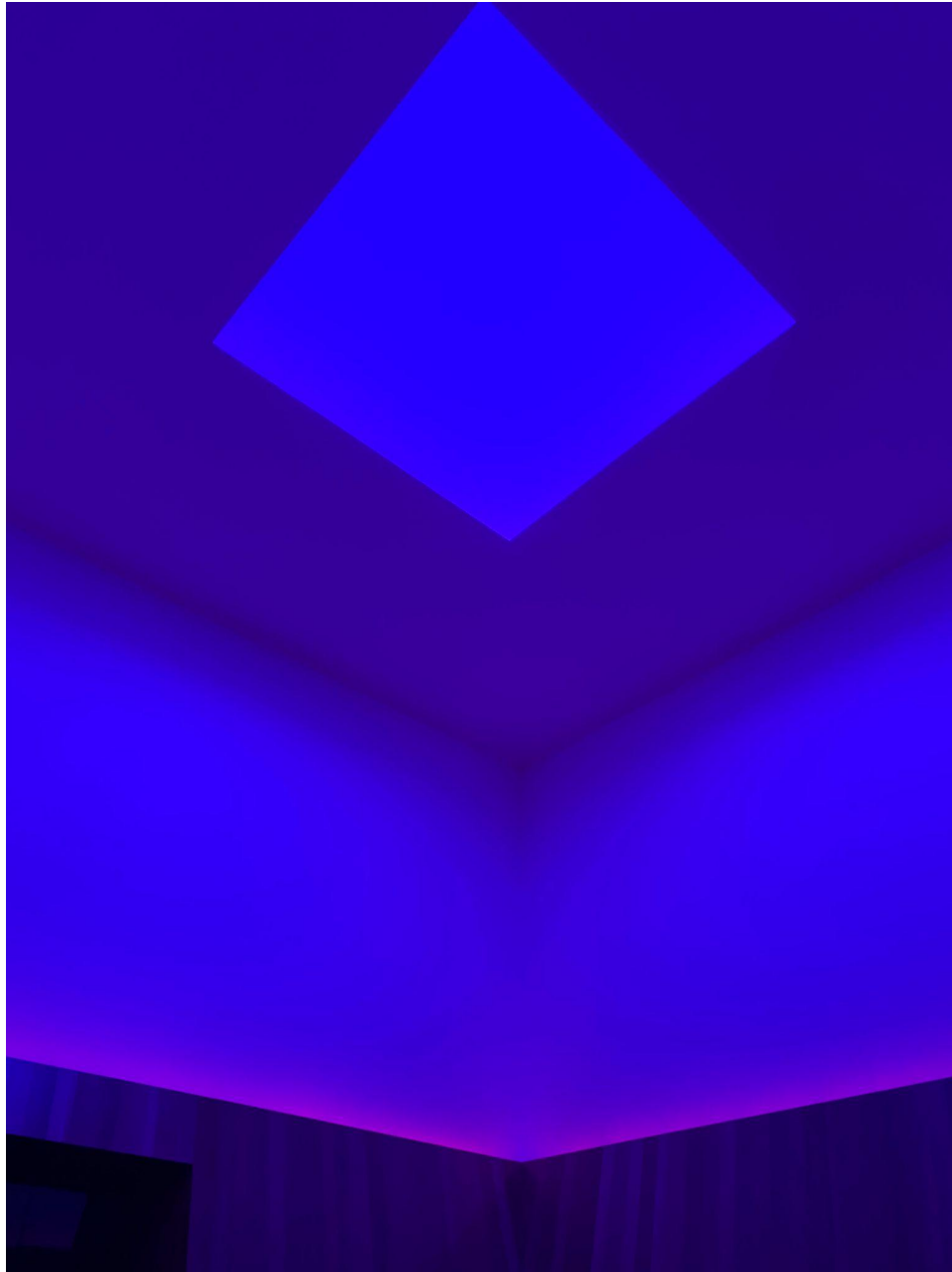


Fig. 15: James Turrell, *Skyspace*, 2016, site-specific installation (Wassenaar: Museum Voorlinden).

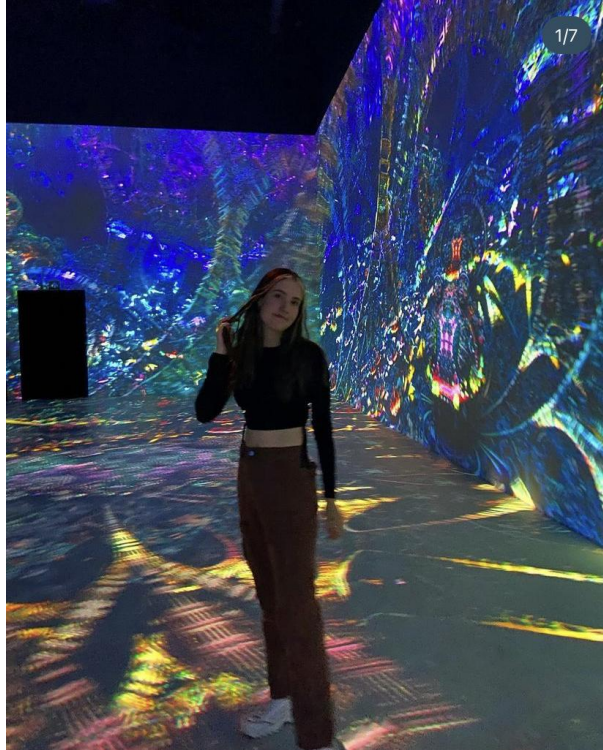


Fig. 16: The first picture of Georgia's Instagram post with Julius Horsthuis' *Foreign Nature*.

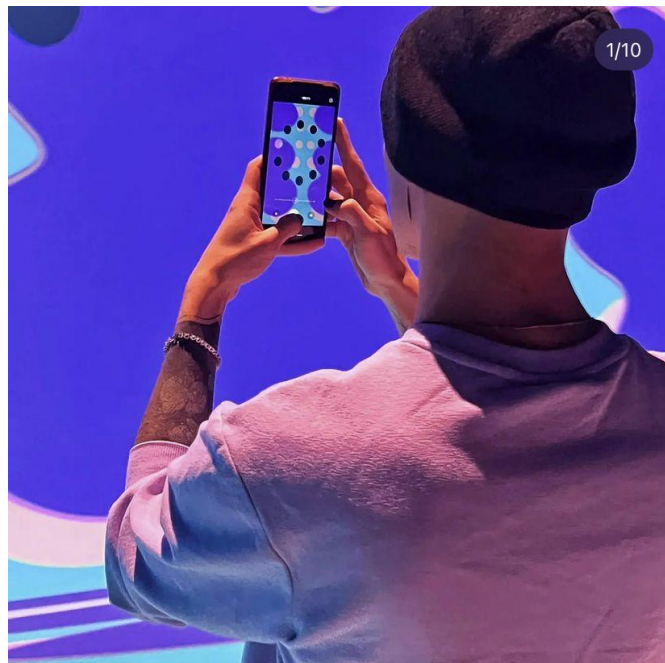


Fig. 17: @alessandropisan' Instagram post from October 25, 2022, where he is seen taking a picture with his phone of Oseanworld's *nu radio World Tour*.



Fig. 18: Harriet Davey, *Viatrix's Odyssey*, 2022, installation of light and sound (Amsterdam: Nxt Museum).

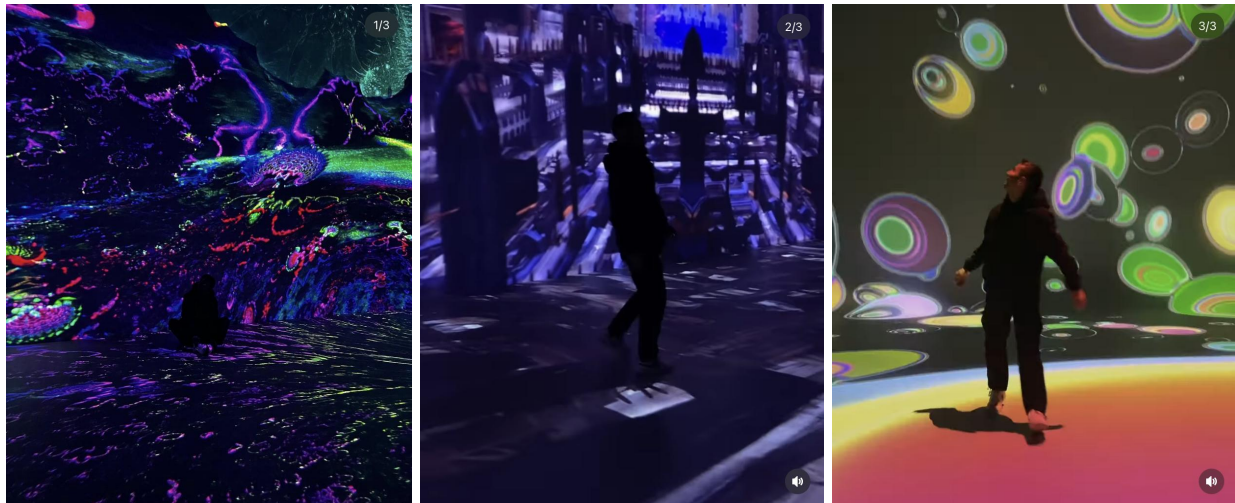


Fig 19: Max's Instagram post with a picture and two videos in Julius Horsthuis' *Foreign Nature* and Oseanworld's *nu radio World Tour*.

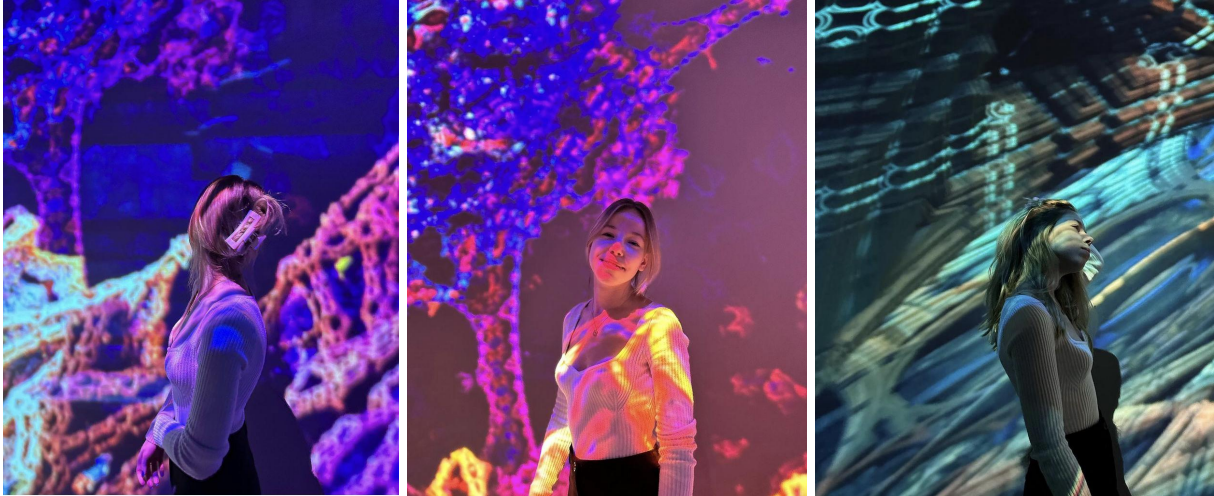


Fig. 20: Francesca's Instagram post with Julius Horsthuis' *Foreign Nature*.

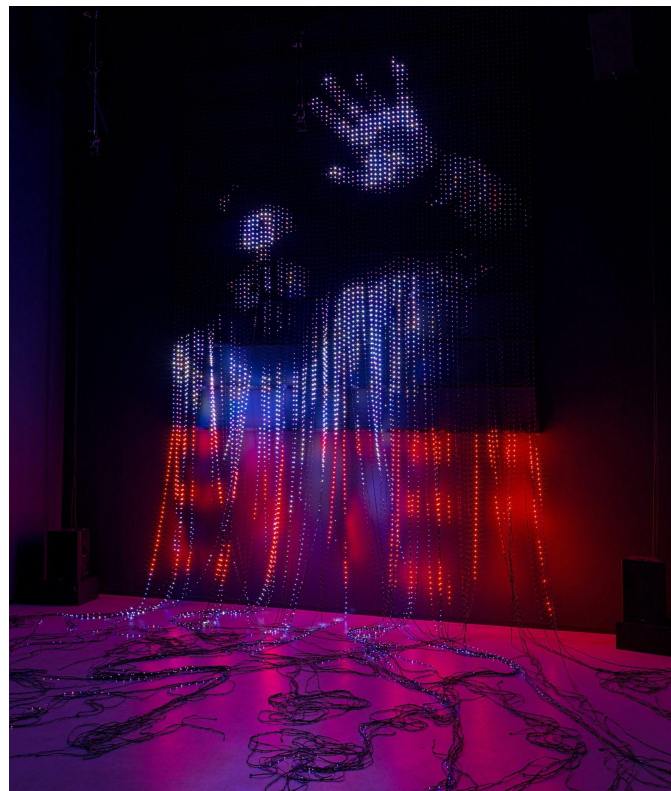


Fig. 21: Ksawery Kirklewski, *ENTER*, 2022, installation (Amsterdam: Nxt Museum).



Fig. 22: Gert Jan van Rooij, “*The Waters in Between* by Audrey Large and *WHOLELAND* by The Fabricant,” 2022, photograph (Amsterdam: Nxt Museum).



Fig. 23: Lara’s Instagram post with Oseanworld’s *nu radio World Tour*.



Fig. 24: Clara's Instagram post with Julius Horsthuis' *Foreign Nature*.



Fig. 25: The first image of Sophie's Instagram post with Oseanworld's *nu radio World Tour*.



Fig. 26: The first image of Ezra's Instagram post with Julius Horsthuis' *Foreign Nature*.

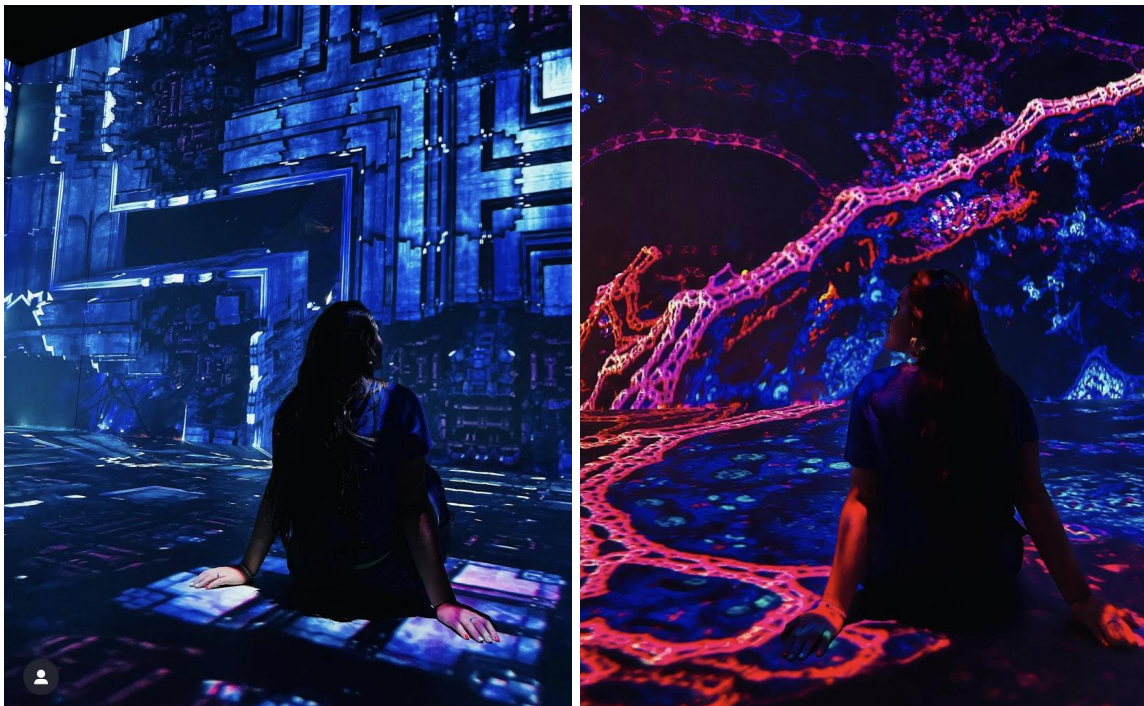


Fig. 27: Chloe's Instagram post with Julius Horsthuis' *Foreign Nature*.



Fig. 28: Nora's Instagram post with Harriet Davey's *Viatrix's Odyssey*.



Fig. 29: Hannah's Instagram post with Oseanworld's *nu radio World Tour*.

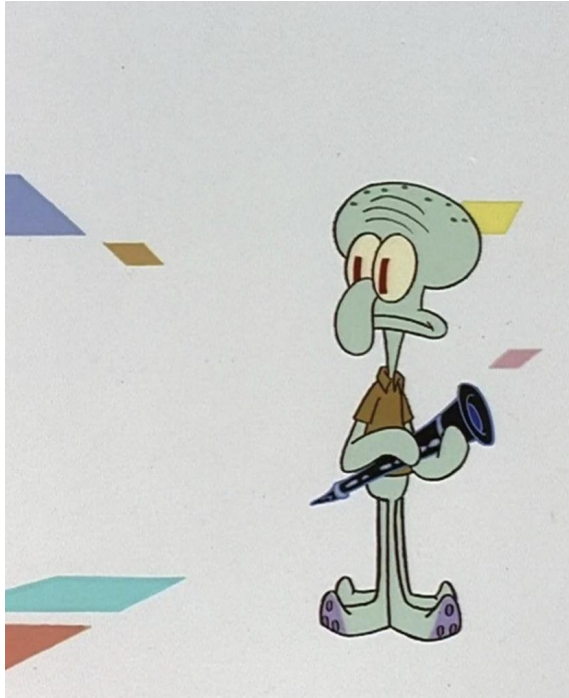
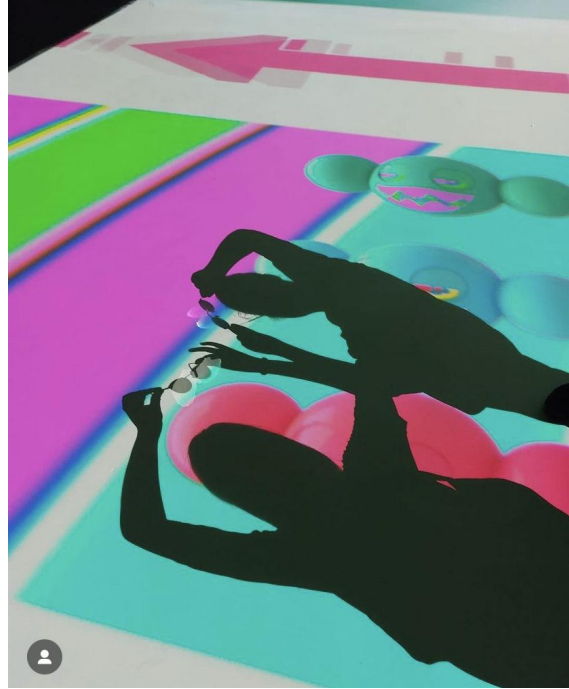


Fig. 30: Daniela's Instagram post with pictures and a video of Oseanworld's *nu radio World Tour* and Julius Horsthuis' *Foreign Nature*.

VIII. Image References

Disclaimer: All participants in this research (fig. 5–14; fig. 16; fig. 19–20; fig. 23–27; fig. 29–31) approved the use of their Instagram posts or personal images for this thesis. All of their posts and images were either sent to the author privately or screenshotted by the author. To protect participants' privacy, all identifying and personal information (such as captions, tags, and usernames) were removed.

Fig. 1 & Fig. 4. *Nxt Museum*. January 28, 2023. Screenshots by author. Image. Accessed May 31, 2023. <https://www.instagram.com/explore/locations/105644277845487/nxt-museum/>

Fig. 2. Oseanworld. *nu radio World Tour*. 2022. Image. *Nxt Museum*. Accessed May 31, 2023. <https://nxtmuseum.com/artist/nuradio-worldtour-oseanworld/>

Fig. 3. Horsthuis, Julius. *Foreign Nature*. 2022. Image. *Nxt Museum*. Accessed May 31, 2023. <https://nxtmuseum.com/artist/foreign-nature-julius-horsthuis/>

Fig. 15. Loh, Anna. Personal Photograph. “James Turrell’s *Skyscape* at Museum Voorlinden, Wassenaar.” April 1, 2023.

Fig. 17. @alessandropisan. “Untitled.” *Instagram*, October 25, 2022. Accessed May 31, 2023. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CkJMVuhqMNZ/>

Fig. 18. Loh, Anna. Personal Photograph. “*Viatrix’s Odyssey* at the Nxt Museum, Amsterdam.” February 2, 2023.

Fig. 21. Kirklewski, Ksawery. *ENTER*. 2022. Image. *Nxt Museum*. Accessed May 31, 2023. <https://nxtmuseum.com/artist/enter-ksawery-kirklewski/>

Fig. 22. Van Rooij, Gert Jan. “The Waters in Between by Audrey Large and WHOLELAND by The Fabricant.” 2022. Image. *Nxt Museum*. Accessed May 31, 2023. <https://nxtmuseum.com/spark-with-art-your-date-at-nxt-museum/>

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