

**teamLab Borderless**

*On value and experience today*

Ingvild Eydís Engebakken



Master dissertation- Art History and Visual Studies

Supervisor Professor Pasi Väliäho

Department of Philosophy, Classics, History of Art and Ideas

UNIVERSITY OF OSLO

Spring 2023



teamLab Borderless

*On value and experience today*

Ingvild Eydís Engebakken

Copyright Ingvild Eydís Engebakken

2023

teamLab Borderless: On value and experience today

Ingvild Eydís Engebakken

<https://www.duo.uio.no>

Trykk: Reprosentralen, Universitetet I Oslo

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<i>The museum that used Instagram as a platform for advertisement and visibility-- and had success with it!</i>	1
<i>A group of specialists making art?</i>	2
<i>Research questions</i>	5
<i>Aims and objectives</i>	7
<i>Structure</i>	8
<b>Literature review</b>	<b>9</b>
<i>Existing research on experience through screen and contemporary art</i>	11
<b>Giuliana Bruno</b>	11
<b>Kate Mondloch</b>	12
<b>Kris Paulsen</b>	13
<i>Existing research on the value of commodities and art-objects</i>	13
<b>Karl Marx</b>	13
<b>Walter Benjamin</b>	14
<b>David Joselit</b>	14
<b>Description of teamLab Borderless</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Thematizing the installation using theories on experience, intimacy and media.</b>	<b>20</b>
<i>1.1 Intimacy in experience; sensing the visitor</i>	21
<i>1.2 Affordance and script; sensing the machine</i>	32
<b>Chapter 2: The concept of value historically and its development in the context of art</b>	<b>38</b>
<i>2.1 Looking at commodity as phantasmagorical form</i>	40
<i>2.2 Art as commodity, and what comes with it</i>	43
<i>2.3 Museums as financial institutions laundering money</i>	47
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>53</b>
<i>What type of experiences does teamLab Borderless generate?</i>	53
<i>What type of value do we ascribe to experiences like the ones teamLab generate?</i>	56
<b>Literature</b>	<b>59</b>



## **Introduction**

### The museum that used Instagram as a platform for advertisement and visibility-- and had success with it!

In 2019, I scrolled through my Instagram explore page, and was surprised by what was showing up on my screen. A young museum advertising a new, immersive exhibition in Tokyo that was all projector and computer based. teamLab Borderless, an exhibition that focuses on flow, projecting art that mimics nature in the form of blooming flowers, waterfall and birds flying between the different rooms inside. An exhibition seeking to bring people together in their spaces with encouraging exploration instead of loneliness. I have always been fascinated by the immersive and “artificial” art. I often find myself gravitating towards anything formulated as idealistic, colourful or high-tech. Not only because of my nature of endless daydreaming, but also because I am somewhat terrified of the new, digitalized world that is based on algorithms and artificial intelligence. That is why I would like to contribute to more knowledge and research on the topic of experiencing technology and art, and how surroundings can be part of that both to myself and people like me. This dissertation will give the reader an understanding of the value in experiencing a digital, less traditional, and disorienting work of art. Further it will see how this museum operates around the term value in relation to the traditional museums. When choosing value as one of the main terms in this dissertation the background was that when looking at experiences like this one, it is often categorized as something different. It is seen as something much more cynical and almost too commercial to be seen as art. I want to explore whether there is such a big difference, and if so, in what way.

The choice of exhibition already raised several reactions early on from both co-students and professors at the university. These reactions were mostly positive, but contained a certain confusion. These stemmed from the idea of art in a more traditional way, and did not include exhibitions like this in their conception of art. On the other hand, there were a few very firm reactions telling me that this exhibition and concept cannot possibly be art. I was told that it is rather something commercial, only for financial gain, so I should not have pursued a dissertation. This dissertation is here to challenge what we view as art. What this will show is that teamLab Borderless might not be so far off the “regular” museum and art exhibitions after all.

The sources are based on teamLab Borderless account on Instagram, that will be used to see how the group and museum is pitching their experience. There are also promotional videos released by teamLab themselves on Youtube, and their own website. Videos on Youtube show the different rooms and spaces that are supplementary sources of the thesis. These videos are mostly filmed by visitors showing their experience of the space and what meets them when visiting. Interviews that talk about the concept of teamLab Borderless and teamLab as a group is also used to get an idea of the intended use of the exhibition. Some are directly with the founder of the group teamLab; Toshiyuki Inoko, others are articles on the subject. Questions about what technology they use that was sent to teamLab, although the answers were vague and secretive and not fit to be used, and therefore it was cut from the dissertation.

With this dissertation being mostly based on material gathered on the internet, not experiencing the exhibition in person is a drawback. With a possibility of teamLab sponsoring the interviews and videos skewing, the bias can not be ruled out. Therefore, it is important to be mindful of the fact that these videos might not always be honest. This in the sense of the possibility that those that has made the videos may have been paid in terms of money or a free visit, in turn for a good review to sell the exhibition to get more visitors. Although in many ways, everything written is affected by something or someone, so I am not the first one to try make sense of something from a distance. I was meant to visit this exhibition but was hampered by covid-19 is one of the reasons why the distance is here. Sadly, the exhibition has been closed for renewal and is set to be opened in a different location in Tokyo later this year. Despite all of this, I believe that looking at the exhibition with distance can be positive, as I will not be influenced positively or negatively by my own experience and will more easily avoid bias.

### A group of specialists making art?

This journey starts at a digital and technological visual project in Odaiba, Tokyo which is relatively new made by a group called teamLab. teamLab is an interdisciplinary group that consists of many different specialists from different disciplines like art, mathematics, architecture, animation, engineering and programming, to mention some.<sup>1</sup> The museum, as teamLab themselves call it, opened in 2018 and is located in the MORI building DIGITAL

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.teamlab.art/about/>



ART MUSEUM, under the name teamLab Borderless. The museum is over 10 000 m<sup>2</sup> and are powered by 520 computers.<sup>2</sup> The projectors are provided by Epson, and several who has visited the museum claims that there are 470 projectors needed to make the experience come alive.

The museum quickly grew popular, and is allegedly the most visited museum in the world as of its first year in operation.<sup>3</sup> The museum is quite active on social media, especially on the application Instagram, which seems to be their biggest arena for advertising and spreading knowledge and enthusiasm around the project. Instagram is where I first saw the project and when I began to dive more into the concept, I quickly decided that this had to be my master thesis.

teamLab describes the museum as a way or desire to get people to open up for a collective experience created together through technology. This does not only mean the collective experience that rise between humans in these spaces, but also between humans and technology. Shortly they describe this visual project as something interactive and something that strives to break the cycle where people mostly close themselves off from the world, and everyone else in the museum when visiting. By that meaning that other visitors are considered as something negative and disturbing in a museum experience, and an empty museum can be considered precious and lucky. So, what they propose with this museum is a way for people to enjoy a museum with others as a joint collective where everyone is important and a part of the work. With this they are hoping to change the view of others to something positive in the museum, but also to highlight a future where digital and highly technological art is closer and more normal as a way of seeing the world.

Before delving deeper into the actual installations, it is important to mention that dissertation will briefly visit other installations and projects that teamLab has made. More specifically their installation Supernature in Macau, a gambling city in China with a special administrative and economic status. They both have in common being experience based, large exhibitions, and the concept of flow both in the terms of the artworks movements and behaviour and the

---

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.teamlab.art/thought/borderless\\_odaiba](https://www.teamlab.art/thought/borderless_odaiba)

<sup>3</sup> <https://hypebae.com/2019/8/teamlab-borderless-planets-art-museum-tokyo-japan>

people. The reason for bringing Supernature into the discussion is to give a more whole picture of the key concepts that the dissertation is trying to grasp.

The key concepts are experience, value and flow. Experience in terms of what the exhibition gives the visitor when being there. Value in terms of what the experience means to the visitors and further in economic terms. Lastly flow in terms of the flow in the artwork, the flow of people, and the financial flow, the *value* of the experience.

The installations and the experience are only based on documentation, since the last couple of years have not presented a borderless number of opportunities to travel the world. We have decided to look at the spatial experience, which means that we will not only look at one particular artwork, but a series of them as they are fluid in the transitions of the rooms inside teamLab Borderless, it is essential to this dissertation to look at teamLab Borderless more as a whole, as a concept so that the experience in terms of the dialogue between visitor and the artworks are the focus. Where the installations are situated will be key when looking at the value of these spaces to try to find similarities and/ or differences between them to highlight the dissertations research questions.

Inside teamLab Borderless there is one room in particular. The name of the room being Universe of Water Particles on a Rock where People Gather. This space is big, the ceiling high, and the floor is in some places three-dimensional, with a little hill. When you enter the room, you are met with lots and lots of moving projected images covering both floor and wall. The room is interactive and responds to the visitor's actions and positions continuously. Here the visitors can make flowers grow by holding their hand against the wall, water will redirect their flow around them when standing still, and if they hit one wall hard enough birds will fly around the room as a result. Although the same projections will react to the visitor's touch, placement and actions, the exact positions and order of the projections will be ever changing, always adapting to the current set-up.

What is interesting with this particular room is that it is in many ways a melting pot of both people and the artworks in the museum, hence the title of it. With that meaning through the whole museum, and all the rooms there is water projected, either on the floor, in the hallways or walls, the water flows through the whole museum, and it all leads to this room. The whole museum is connected to this oasis, and all the rooms and artworks are connected with each

other, but also with this room. There is also projected parades between the artworks, where figures are marching and celebrating, leading the visitors gently through the museum. It is an unhindered flow throughout, both with visitors and with the artworks. At the same time there is no borders between the artworks and the visitors. There is no glass that stops the visitors from touching them, on the contrary; you are meant to touch everything surrounding you. There is no right or wrong behaviour, the visitors can do what they want. The artworks communicate with, influence and sometimes intermingle with each other, and the visitors are as much a part of the artworks as the artworks themselves. The project Borderless never seem to have one static state when it comes to both time and space. With this meaning that teamLab Borderless can be seen as a mediator of interaction, of how the visitors are interacting with technology, and how technology is interacting with the visitors.

A common denominator is that the museum and all their artworks are disorienting. They are dark and almost built like a labyrinth, there seems to be no windows, and that is of course because of the projectors. They do not provide the visitors with any maps or directions of the inside, which contributes to the disorientation but also encourages the visitors to be curious. In many ways the loss of the sense of direction invites the visitors to let go of their sense of self too, as they can choose to become a part of the artworks and the collective that forms inside the installation. Some of the rooms are apparently very hard to find and you most likely would not be able to find all of them in one visit.

### Research questions

teamLab Borderless shut down with the rest of the world under the recent pandemic, naturally decreasing the number of visitors, travelling, and sharing. With a global travel ban, the ever so global flow of visitors halted to a stop, and the museum was closed. Museums all over the globe were performing virtual tours to keep the artworks alive and relevant, but still give the public the opportunity to enjoying art in their homes while in lockdown. teamLab Borderless on the other hand was completely silent in lockdown and the virtual tours were non-existent, as well as the advertising on Instagram that they did so much of both before and after.

This thesis will attempt to answer questions that revolves around the concept of value, and experience.

*-What type of experiences does the Borderless exhibition generate?*

*-And what type of value do we ascribe to it?*

To answer these questions the dissertation must answer the following:

*-What relationships develop between visitors and the technology in the exhibition?*

*-How are the visitors affected by each other and the technology?*

*-How has the way we value an artwork changed from an historic view up until today?*

*-How can artworks be influenced by their position?*

The dissertation is more about the museum practice rather than the actual artwork. Meaning it is not only about the viewing experience, but more about the whole institutional concept of drawing the visitors inside, it is about the artwork consuming the consumer. It is about the concept of collecting and creating a flow of people and to steer this flow through a visual experience. It is about the concept of gathering people and the economy of the people gathered, and how to make a profit from it.

In many ways this dissertation is trying to unfold, unveil or draw, an invisible map of processes that happens in, around and about this digital largescale space of experience, and how we can put that into a visual study and connect it, or not connect it to other art institutions or practices.

This dissertation is positioned in several fields of research. Firstly it is positioned in the field of art and visual studies, as the object of observation here is projector-based art. It will discuss topics that has been discussed before in art history as spatial experience and spectatorship as well as touch and surface. Secondly the dissertation lies in the field of media. Here we can see that the technology is more relevant with terms like affordance, script and limitations. What they have in common though is that they are touching the question of value and experience. Third the field of economy/finance. With this discussion surrounding terms like value and commodity follows. The thesis will with these terms from each field have one common ground which is value, and the discussion will explore different kind of ways that we can look at value in the context of art.

To connect this with teamLab Borderless we will use some of the methods they are using to show a sense of grounding back in time but using it on contemporary pieces. Other scholars don't analyse the same technology because there is an understanding that there is no need for

the analysis of new artworks since it is already analysed. But the context is different which is what this field of research need. Especially after the pandemic.

There is little research on this concrete subject with teamLab Borderless as the main source, but the thesis will contain research on technology and screenbased art, mediastudies and theories on value in a globalized world. Let me explain the perspectives and theories a bit closer below.

### Aims and objectives

The motivation for the dissertation is to gather more information surrounding the communication between the experience of an artwork and the value it is assigned. The dissertation will put this in a context of the surroundings in the form of the placement of the museums and how this can potentially change the view of value. With this I want to put the contemporary topics in a historical context by using earlier theories and put them against newer theories that do not necessarily belong in the traditional art history field. I want to better understand the complexity of mixing art, media, technology and site specificity. And lastly to find out what happens to immaterial work and their value when its placement is highly influenced by capitalism.

When I began to read about the project, I often found myself thinking; Why and how? Very shortly after this I saw that there was not many, or any, that had dived into this group and analysed teamLab Borderless. It seemed strange as the group had been internationally known for some time and already had exhibitions and collaborations with big museums and corporations. Their real breakthrough already started in 2011 when they were invited to showcase their art in Takashi Murakami's gallery in Japan. Until then, they were not really seen as artists in Japan. There were so many unanswered questions around the spatial experience and how this blended with the financial part of the museum that I decided that it had to be interesting to formulate some of them more specifically.

I quickly want to disclaim that the thesis will not be containing illustrations or images of the exhibitions. This is a conscious choice as I want to encourage the reader to visit the weblinks and pages referred to instead. This seems more natural than showing still photos as the exhibitions are based in movements and flow.

## Structure

The project will revolve around these key concepts: value and experience. There are different ways to look at this which will be discussed in this thesis, these concepts will be the anchor of the thesis. The method for this thesis is to divide it into two that will discuss different sides of the two key concepts.

As aforementioned this thesis is divided into different discussion, but they will all have a common purpose and an anchor. First, the dissertation will discuss the spatial experience and how intimacy and technology can co-exist. It will explore how surroundings can put the visitor in a mood or situation where they are influenced to experience the space different and how the visitors are affected by each other and the technology. This will thoroughly set the artwork and its *being* in the context of intimacy and the visitors but also what limitations comes with this kind of experience.

Secondly we will discuss value in the form of commodities and art as commodity. We will explore the art institutions practices when it comes to how they treat art as commodities. Further we will see if teamLab uses their locations consciously as a way of underlining the financial aspects of museum practice. The thesis will already have explored the value of experience which will blend a bit into this topic. With that I mean that for the discussion of what makes something valuable you have to keep both history and ontology in mind as it is relevant to what determines value.

## Literature review

Issues on surface, media, and installation art in the form of screens, projections and lighting has been discussed for quite some time. Through texts about photography, film or even the phantasmagoria it is established quickly that it is not a new topic that comes with the era of internet and recent technology. There does not seem to be any concrete studies on a project like teamLab Borderless yet, which is why this will be a puzzle pieced together by historic texts and new research on both media, art, and value.

To get a more recent view on experiencing art, texts on media installation art through Giuliana Bruno<sup>4</sup>, Kris Paulsen<sup>5</sup> and Kate Mondloch<sup>6</sup> gives a more updated perspective and take on the topic. Their common ground of exploration is their urge to connect or fill in the gap between art and media, and the spectator and spectators' relationship to media art installations. There are several studies on these relations and that there is a certain amount of internal dialogue or flow of consciousness between the spectator and the space they are in. Bruno as opposed to the two others adds a view on the actual architecture or building that these spatial experiences are in as well as the similarities the cinema and the museum have with each other. This comparison is something that speaks to this project as there are so many different opinions of what teamLab Borderless is; an entertainment arena much like a cinema or playground, or an interactive, highly technological museum or art-exhibition.

Kate Mondloch offers a view on spectatorship as something that is based in a mutual relationship between the spectator and the spectated. This is seen as a way of breaking the dominant narratives that focus on the exhibitions or art alone, and the idea of spectators when meeting a screen becomes passive. Kris Paulsen further want to elaborate on this as she want to connect this to politics more, and explores television based installations as a way of defining the role of the spectator.

Walter Benjamin<sup>7</sup> was early with his pressing concerns of the artworks cultural value in the age of reproduction and presented that the artworks uniqueness disappears with the new age

---

<sup>4</sup> Bruno, *Surface* (Chicago & London: The university of Chicago press & The university of Chicago press Ltd. London, 2014)

<sup>5</sup> Paulsen, *Here/There* (Cambridge, Massachusetts : The MIT press, 2017)

<sup>6</sup> Mondloch, *Screens*. (Minneapolis: The university of Minnesota Press, 2010)

<sup>7</sup> Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility* (London: Penguin books Ltd., 2008)

of technology. However, this might be considered more as a reaction and a critique to the Marxist way of looking at commodities and seeing their “true” value in the form of labour and material cost, rather than appreciate it for its cultural value or traditional rooting. A relevant perspective when looking at art as commodity is the possibilities with the loss of the aura. With this Benjamin’s perspective is still relevant and representative to the way we see artworks uniqueness although some claims otherwise.

By dissecting the methods that art institutions are using to exhibit art and the way they operate when it comes to value and money, David Joselit shines a light on things that are not often talked much about in the same sentence as art; museums as financial institutions. Joselit is one of those who have read Benjamin as exclusively negative and even claims his views on art as a roadblock for further discussions on contemporary art. Although this statement might not occupy a much of the book, it comes across as ignorant not considering the more sides with the loss of aura that Benjamin writes about.

Although there is literature on spatial experience in the form of art installations or cinema, there is a lack of analysis or discussions that includes a more commercial project like this one, which is growing progressively in popularity in this day of age. This requires more attention in visual studies, especially looking at installations in the context of experience and value, together, which is what we will do with these different theories. However, the existing literature on media, art and the relations regarding spatial experience has flourished for years and will continue to do so as it finds its way through new fields of vision and perspectives.

I want to emphasize that even though we discuss these art-institutions and the concept of value, I do not mean that the aesthetic experiences, value, or validity is erased, diminished, or reduced if these institutions are funded or profiting of exhibiting art. The purpose is to go deeper into this more clinical part of exhibiting art because it is often forgotten. I believe it is often forgotten because it is not displayed as a part of the experience, and if we as a visitor get caught up in the art exhibited, we often forget everything around. What this thesis will show is that value in the context of art is more than exclusively the experience from the installation you visit.



## Existing research on experience through screen and contemporary art

### **Giuliana Bruno**

With Giuliana Bruno's book "Surface: Matters of aesthetics, materiality, and media"<sup>8</sup> she is trying to re-define or refashion the term of materiality by remapping a genealogy of screens.<sup>9</sup> She explores how art and media in many forms can be connected and interwoven by surface and materiality by diving into historical artworks and many forms of installation art. Here, she is arguing that materiality is not determined by form of material, but the substance of the material relations.<sup>10</sup> Exploring the different surfaces of those relations and discussing them in a way that does not exclude immaterial art or light from the materials of actual things. By discussing the surfaces as a form of site where transformations take place in different forms Bruno weaves art, new media, architecture, and cinema together. Bruno defines this through the term surface and material relations, and claims that when the spectator enters a space of mediation, as an art-installation or something different, the spectator always dresses themselves with the space in the same way as they put on clothes.<sup>11</sup> With this she actually explores the space as something that touch the spectator back, and that there is at connection or communication even if there is "just" light that hits the spectator's skin.<sup>12</sup> Bruno shows that viewing art is more all-consuming than you would think.

Her take on materiality and surfaces are interesting to use because she explores some of the same issues around environmental space, architectural mediatic transformations and framing. She proposes a valid point with claiming the materiality of the immaterial. Although Bruno has some very good points and claims, I still cannot find any critical claims or perspectives in her book, which is somewhat alarming. Bruno comes off as quite idealistic and displays a harmony that seems to be in everything. What I believe is important here is that this is problematic as it does not really highlight any problems or deviants. To me it seems as a take on the aesthetics in textual form. I experience it as a textual take on many of the examples she uses of surface and the relations she talks about. This space of mediation that she talks about feels like as if you enter it when you read. It encloses around you and tucks you into her way of seeing these things. It is very easy to be persuaded and carried away although it is obvious

---

<sup>8</sup> Bruno, *Surface* (Chicago & London: The university of Chicago press & The university of Chicago press Ltd. London, 2014)

<sup>9</sup> Bruno, *Surface*. p. 107

<sup>10</sup> Bruno, *Surface*. p. 2

<sup>11</sup> Bruno, *Surface*. p. 18

<sup>12</sup> Bruno, *Surface*. p. 18 & 19

what is happening. She has a compelling attentiveness and sensitivity to the subject, that is both a curse and an inspiration.

### **Kate Mondloch**

If we look more closely at the studies on surface Kate Mondloch's book "Screens: Viewing media installation art"<sup>13</sup> discusses a range of installations and ways of viewing. In that way she shows how things have developed in the context of visual art institutions. Mondloch explores the shift in contemporary art that challenges spectatorship that has come with technological objects. With this she talks of the spectator or the viewer as screen subjects and unveil how screen spectatorship has evolved and changed since the 1970's. With screen subjects Mondloch is developing a relationship between the screen or artworks and the spectator which proposes that it is not a one-way street whereas the screen is capturing or controlling the spectator. She proposes that the spectator has a much bigger role to a screenreliant artwork where the artwork is reliant on the spectator gaze and movements.

In this book Mondloch uses art to understand media culture, which is what this thesis aims to do. Although my first thought was that Mondloch was more traditional, she expresses a critical angle towards what she calls the dominant narratives. These dominant narratives are presented as art critics and scholars analysis that proposes that the screen controls the body and that arthistory is very in the box, non flexible and very traditional subject. What is also important here is the fact that Mondloch is dissecting the study of art and the study of media in order to bring the two closer together to claim that they are not mutually exclusive.

Although there is a lot of good points in this book it still fails to discuss the effect of the importance of the landscape this space, museum or gallery is built in is equally important to determine whether the visitors, spectators or screen subjects are influenced to have a different experience. It is worth mentioning that in my opinion it is very ineffective to build an argument on contemporary screen art with only previous examples of screen reliant artworks. As art, technology, and media is rapidly developing, it is crucial to speak of something that is here and now. I agree that we need to look backwards in order to understand the present, but an analysis of the present lacks something important if the whole discussion continues to exclude a current and contemporary example.

---

<sup>13</sup> Mondloch, *Screens*. (Minneapolis: The university of Minnesota Press, 2010)

## **Kris Paulsen**

Kris Paulsen adds a more political view of the topic of relations between viewer and surface. Kris Paulsen “Here/there: telepresence, touch, and art at the interface” central claim is that retrospective and critical look on artworks can offer an understanding of the rapid mediatization and remediation of sensory experience and how to preserve the social and political relationships to what is mediated.<sup>14</sup> This is much like what Mondloch tries to do in her analysis. It is a way of trying to grasp and preserve the in-between, the experience and the lessons of this experience. Through the book Paulsen writes and discuss remote physical manipulation, and the fantasy of touch and physical presence.<sup>15</sup> The essence is to first and foremost to try to right where Paulsen consider Mondloch went wrong. She proposes a retrospective look to understand the development in artworks and how they are mediated.<sup>16</sup> This is the same approach as Mondloch has but a more wholeheartedly attempt on connecting it to arthistory.

Paulsen immediately felt much more like something that would fit both media and art studies. With Mondloch I felt that something was missing, as if she was not discussing things enough in depth. Paulsen is much more mindful to the mission she has set out for herself, which was to connect art studies with the media discussed. The way she used theories about the subject of screens and interface and discussing and tracing the core of its functions made it more of an interdisciplinary text. This is where Mondloch fails as there is a more interwoven text that respects both disciplines with Paulsen, and with that you lose some of the attentiveness that Bruno has. There is also a tendency with Paulsen to look at screens as only connected to technology, whilst Bruno has a broader vision of what a screen is.

## Existing research on the value of commodities and art-objects

### **Karl Marx**

Marx discusses different ways an object or commodity has value in his book “Capital”<sup>17</sup>. Marx goes into extensive detail about the economic aspect of commodities when criticising the capitalistic ways of exploit and constant chase after more. Marx offers a way of looking at objects and seeing their “true” value in the form of material and labour cost. What the book

---

<sup>14</sup> Paulsen, *Here/There* (Cambridge, Massachusetts : The MIT press, 2017) p. 5

<sup>15</sup> Paulsen, *Here/there*. p. 7

<sup>16</sup> Paulsen, *Here/there*. p.5

<sup>17</sup> Marx, *Capital*. Volume 1 (London: Lowe & Brydone, 1967)

shows is that with capitalism the potential to make the most of it surpasses the morals of offering fair payment to the workers making the product.

### **Walter Benjamin**

Walter Benjamin is the more art-focused theorist in this discussion around value. With the term commodity, his essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility”<sup>18</sup> comes to mind. In this essay Benjamin discuss the value of art in the new era of mass production. At first glance he comes across as very negative to this new era of photography and reproduction of art. He writes about the artworks cultural value and what is truly the essence of the artwork is its specific placement in time, space and place. Benjamin’s views on art as commodity are interesting and can be applied in the discussion of the value of the specific locations of teamLab Borderless. He does not only discuss the downfall of the authentic soul of art he calls the aura, but he also discusses what emerge with the new artform of photography and film. He raises possibilities as democracy, diversity, equality, and political aspects.

This text from Benjamin is interesting for discussing an immaterial artwork that is in one way a reproduction of something, but also non-repeatable immaterial artwork as it is everchanging and not stored or saved in any way. Here we can ask the same question over again; what is value of an artwork, and if the authenticity is gone. If so, does it not carry any value anymore? An artwork like teamLab Borderless and teamLab Supernature are artworks that lies in-between the immaterial reproduced work of art and an everchanging immaterial artwork, which is why you will find both Benjamin and teamLab in the same dissertation.

### **David Joselit**

In “After Art”<sup>19</sup>, David Joselit presents his take on the “industry” of art institutions and the economic aspect of the museum. The book gives the reader insight to how an image process is once it is displayed and enters a marketplace or what he calls “circulation”<sup>20</sup>. Meaning what happens when an artwork is entering for example museums or other institutions. The term currency in the context of images both connected to sites but also connected to the free flow of images will be key here as Joselit is setting arts stable trading value against the world’s instable economy.

---

<sup>18</sup> Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility* (London: Penguin books Ltd., 2008)

<sup>19</sup> Joselit, *After Art* (New Jersey and Oxfordshire: Princeton University Press, 2013)

<sup>20</sup> Joselit, *After art*. p. xiv

Continuing down the path of value Joselit discusses the power that these art institutions hold both culturally and economically. With this power, value is assigned the objects the institutions consider rare, has the right age or material. Furthermore, it is made clear through Joselits book that every museum is dependent on some outsider influence as well<sup>21</sup>, so the question of value and economy is applicable to any museum or art institution. What I want to explore with this is if teamLab Borderless are trying to remove themselves from the “regular” or “traditional” museum practice or in what way are they changing the look on value and the economic aspect of the art institutions.

Joselit is claiming that museum industry is one big business of distribution exactly like other entertainment industries, only more sophisticated.<sup>22</sup> Although it does not seem as if Joselit looks at this as a negative thing, rather the opposite if the power that comes with this is used in the right way. Meaning to showcase democracy, or to mirror not the opinion of the individual but of a group. I think this is a lovely message that is contradicting the institutional critique. Is teamLab Borderless showing Japans pride of being a forward- thinking country?

---

<sup>21</sup> Joselit, *After art*. p. 86 & 87

<sup>22</sup> Joselit, *After art*. p. 89

## Description of teamLab Borderless

Imagine the travel ban in 2020 and 2021 did not exist. Pretend that you as reader is about to embark a plane to Japan with me. As we reach Tokyo as our last destination of our 15-hour flight we are exhausted but excited. In the next few days, we explore the city as the tourists we are, visiting famous places. One of them is Odaiba that started as a capital defence and now is a thriving entertainment district.

Odaiba is most known as the main tourist area of Tokyo, an amusement district and a haven of shopping and entertainment. The area holds a lot of futuristic and modern buildings and interesting history. This area lies in Tokyo Bay, and is a man-made island that is based on several small islands that was built for defence or fort islands as some call it near the end of the Edo period, in the 1800's. Later in the 1980's it was decided to develop the small islands to one big island that was supposed to become a new, modern business and residential district. But with an economic crisis rising the building slowed and the area did not really develop to what it is today before the opening of the trainline, several hotels and shopping malls in the second half of the 1990's. Now it holds some of the most iconic structures in Tokyo such as the Daikanrasha Ferris-wheel, the beautiful Rainbow Bridge that lights up at night and the Fuji TV building with its recognizable 32 meter in diameter titanium silver orb, that functions as an observation platform for visitors overlooking Mount Fuji and the Tokyo skyline.

There are many ways to get to Odaiba such as train, waterbus, ferry, bus, and bicycle. We choose to take the Yurikamome line that stops at Aomi station, from there it is just a short walk to an entertainment complex and shopping mall Palette Town (not be confused with Pallet Town, the childhood home of the character Ash from the popular tv-show Pokémon) which is right by the train station. Palette Town houses the big ferris wheel Daikanrasha, but also Toyotas MegaWeb, Venus fort and the MORI building digital art museum (not to be confused with MORI museum, MORI art museum or MORI art center). It is quite easy to locate them all as there is a map of the complex at the train station.

Walking into this "town" feels like entering exactly what it is, a place of amusement and entertainment. At my right side the front of Daikanrasha is lit up and beside it the Venus Fort looking boxy and very much like a shopping mall. Venus Fort with its big screens announces, and almost screams at you that "yes indeed, it is me, come inside!". Reluctantly I walk inside

with a thought of it being just another shopping mall. When entering, I clearly see the floors being divided into three colours, 1<sup>st</sup> is green, for Venus Family. 2<sup>nd</sup> is pink for Venus Grand. 3<sup>rd</sup> is blue for Venus Outlet. The real attraction is based on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor; as I enter it transforms into something designed to look like something from the Italian Renaissance. It looks nothing like the boxy exterior, it is formed like European streets to wander. Like a grand passageway with several squares. With a beautiful fountain, real olive trees, a church and a replica of the mouth of truth where you can go make a wish. What a strange feeling to walk through a shopping mall, surrounded by the scent of olive trees! All around there is big stores; like Tokyos biggest Lego store, fashion stores, jewellery, and the entrance to MegaWeb. If you choose to buy some clothes, but they don't fit perfectly, the mall also includes a very convenient clothing alteration service that will alter your clothes on-the-day so that you leave with perfectly fitted, brand new clothing.

When I am done at this peculiar place and left my clothes for altering, I walk to the MORI building which is nearby. The sight of the building does not actually tell me what is inside. As I get to the entrance which lies right beneath Daikanrasha what I see is basically just a big block with the sign that say; MORI building DIGITAL ART MUSEUM; EPSON teamLab Borderless. When entering there rules to follow so make sure that you read the instructions thoroughly, the hosts points to a sign in English while talking in Japanese, with smiles on their faces standing patiently by the queue.

As we walk in, what met us was not a reception where the hosts stood behind it and waiting for us to seek them out. They approached us as a visitor in a way we have never experienced in an art visit before. They stood by the waiting line welcoming us in Japanese with a smile, pointing to the signs that told me about the rules in English. Before we have really stepped into the exhibition and scanned the ticket, we have a new experience of an art visit. What this tells us is that at the entrance there is a slight sneak peek at what is to come, but it is subtle. Suspicions tell me that this is not accidental at all, and more likely to be a calculated move to make the experience whole. It is all thoroughly planned.

I scan my ticket myself, and as I walk in, I see a sign that tells me I can download their app, to get the most out of the experience. The app tracks my location and with that I can send a wish to one of the rooms on how to behave.

Next after scanning the ticket and downloading the app we walk into a dark room where we have to choose which direction we want to go. It is disorienting, and I believe this to be almost like a rite of passage, this is where you leave your real world behind and where you are transitioned to a new clean slate. In many ways you are starting your tour with getting rid of expectations you have so that when the experience starts you are perceptible to new input, and more open because of this intense darkness. Reaching your “destination” will be even more impactful because your senses are getting shocked by the amount of light, sound, and smell. You *must* pass through this unpleasant small hallway to receive your award. It might also actually have an impact on your reward system in your brain because of this and trigger your feeling of mastery.

As I walk into the exhibition and are being surrounded with dark walls and little to no light, there are three signs in front of me. Each one has a different name which is telling me that I have three choices. I can choose to go to the right or the left. The title on the right says “Butterfly House”, while the two titles on the left says “Athletic Forrest” and “Forrest of Flowers and people”. Before arrival I read that there are 5 zones that contain 60 artworks in total, but there is no map, only the three choices I have in front of me. It is up to me to wander and explore this myself.

We decide that we want to explore the path on the left first, and immediately feel disoriented as we walk through the narrow barely lit passage. With only my hearing as our guidance we reach a black curtain and when we peak through the slit we are barely seeing, a big colourful world of blooming flowers and plants is unveiled. I had read about this before we went but am still taken aback by surprise. It is so vibrant and intense with music playing in the background and suddenly smelling hints of flowers while walking through flowers both on the floor and the walls. This is the “Forest of Flowers and People”, there is no doubt, and it feels surprisingly real for having a look that is obviously fabricated. These flowers and plants are not fixed, they float, they move through the whole room, just as it would when the wind blows or a speed up version of how they grow. There is lots of nooks and crannies everywhere, sometimes with hidden rooms behind or inside them. These rooms also contain artworks to explore of different natures, but we decide to focus on this room of flowers. Moving through this alternate world, we realise that there are not only projectors lighting up the walls here, but also mirrors. Moving towards a wall placed in the middle of the room discovering that as we are stepping on the blooms on the floor they dissolve and floats away.



These things are so inviting, warm and mesmerizing, so touching them feels as natural as it would in a flower field. When reaching the partly empty wall, placing my hand on the surface, seconds later more blooming flowers and plants pops up from the surface of my hand and the surrounding area. It makes me feel connected in some way, and I keep walking with my hands barely touching the surface just as I would passing through a flower field.

Moving through the exhibit gives off a natural feeling, simply because the people around me is slowly moving the same way as me, it is as though we, the visitors, suddenly moves and in many ways behave in the same way as the artworks. There is this organic flow and calmness that lures us through this maze of experience. It can be reminiscent of dancing, the constant reading of movements and reacting to movements. The dance makes us follow the artworks and motives that appears through the rooms and as we go, I realise that the motives has led me to a new room with a new experience and ambiance. Unfortunately, annoyance when people stand in my way or make unnecessary noise appears. Even though teamLab tries to make it enjoyable, the flow somewhat dampens the feeling of being annoyed, much like dancing. You might bump into someone and feel a bit out of sync or think that someone is in your way, but its ok because everyone is having an experience together.

## Chapter 1: Thematizing the installation using theories on experience, intimacy and media.

In this chapter we will delve into the experience of teamLab Borderless. It will be thematized and focused on affect and experience through the theories of Giuliana Bruno, Kris Paulsen and Kate Mondloch. The chapter will turn an investigative look at descriptions of the exhibition and weave it together with the theory in use. It will focus on three key terms: *Surface* from Bruno, *Spectatorship* from Mondloch and *Indexicality* from Paulsen. The dissertation will shine a light onto this form of spatial experience and the communication between visitor and the exhibition. teamLab Borderless is the perfect example to use for this perspective because it has become a big talking point in current pop-culture and has a lot of followers, exposure, and support. It has become a popular site for many users and influencers on the app Instagram. Influencers are shortly described as people that influence others to buy or visit places through most popularly social media and by doing this, they earn money. Many of my own friends know of or have seen posts of the Borderless exhibition while scrolling through their “explore”-page on Instagram. teamLab Borderless even made it into the Guinness World Records for being the most visited museum in 2019.<sup>23</sup> What seems to be a common misconception here, is that since the concept is harder to understand, it cannot be seen as art. This is intriguing and is one of the main reasons that work on this continued even when it became clear that visiting and experiencing it myself due to the pandemic would not happen.

We move straight into to the room “Forest of Flowers and People”. There is a lot to look at, and with an art historic perspective there is some things that emerges right away. The behaviour of the visitors. The bright lights resembling flowers everywhere, or the motifs as you could call it. And the use of smell. This is something that I have only encountered once in a museum, and it was in a very controlled environment. It was at a temporary exhibition named *Countless Aspects of Beauty* at the National Archaeological Museum of Athens. There they had developed a scent that was supposed to represent the Antiquity based on 18 months

---

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.timeout.com/tokyo/news/teamlab-borderless-takes-guinness-world-record-for-the-worlds-most-visited-museum-071421>

of researching ancient scripts and methods in which they named *Rose of Afrodite*.<sup>24</sup> The scent was available in a boiling flask mounted to the wall that you could walk up to and smell. It had most of the room to itself, which to me, made it a bit uncomfortable. As a visitor, I experienced it as uncomfortable because it felt like I was on display once I stepped forward to smell the flask. I got so self-conscious about the fact that I was almost participating in a ritual of smelling where I, too, was a part of the exhibition for others to see.

What is an interesting contrast here is that teamLab seems to be releasing scent continuously in different locations in their exhibition, leaving the visitor not knowing exactly where the scent is coming from and not being in control of what scents to take in or not. It is involuntarily much like when you would go for a walk and the wind brings a scent to you that disappears as fast as it arrives. This is a different approach than the one in Athens where everything depends on the visitor to walk up to the bottle by their own will. It is up to the visitor to participate in the “ritual”, as opposed to the forced experience of smelling in teamLab Borderless. This is a calculated part of teamLab Borderless’ vision which is to connect people to nature, but through their artificial world of somewhat lifelike projections.<sup>25</sup> If you combine this with the fact that they make you go through this rite of passage, through a long dark hallway, it is almost as if it is expected that the visitor is much more aware and appreciative over this phenomenon. Meaning that although there is a forced element, the visitor has in many ways been prepared for this on the way in.

## 1.1 Intimacy in experience; sensing the visitor

In the room “Forrest of Flowers and People”, we can discuss the behaviour of the projected light as part of what manipulate, curate, or affect the visitor’s experience. The projected light you see in this room reflects the whole concept and is the most recognizable and characteristic room of the exhibition. I want to look at the projected light as a surface when meeting the visitors first. Giuliana Bruno one of those who has been writing a lot about the definition of a surface. Bruno uses the term surface instead of images<sup>26</sup>, with this it is meant that she treats

---

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.greece-is.com/news/ancient-perfume-recreated-for-archaeological-museum-exhibition/> & <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/30/scents-of-antiquity-revived-for-exhibition-at-athens-museum>

<sup>25</sup> [https://www.teamlab.art/e/borderless\\_odaiba/#highlight](https://www.teamlab.art/e/borderless_odaiba/#highlight)

<sup>26</sup> Bruno, *Surface*. p. 3

any surface as a potential screen or space of projection.<sup>27</sup> It can be clothes, a body, a wall, a screen, a sculpture. Bruno draws a quite direct line between projected light and clothes, where she states that they both are just as easy folded or laid on the surface of things. In this case architecture and visitors' bodies, and with this Bruno describes what happens in meeting one as something natural or harmonic.<sup>28</sup>

Not only can the light be something that is wrapped around you or flows lightly on the skin like a dress, but it can also just as easily be worn out because of our loss in interest for it and be patchy because dust or dirt has made its way to the lens of the projector.<sup>29</sup> And just as what you wear can affect your mood, projected light can do the same. It can affect you in the same way as when you put on your absolute favourite outfit and go to work, or when you try on a dress or jacket, and feel awful because it itches, or has the wrong colour. This convincing way of describing how something outside of us makes an impact to us on the inside, is something that really resonates with this exhibition. It is a fabricated space that uses interactive projected light to make it seem and feel more real, so that it affects and moves the visitors both externally and internally. It shows that it affects despite being fake or fabricated.

It is crucial to look at the medium which in this case is projectors casting light onto a surface. What seems to be Kate Mondloch's fundamental argument and belief is that there has not been enough focus on "the defining role of the screen apparatus that manage the interactions and the relationships between the viewing subjects and the media objects"<sup>30</sup>. In this the continuous movement and engaging of the visitor lies, and *making* people look, as Mondloch would claim.<sup>31</sup> Although there is not only the spectator that is being moved and controlled in this case. There is also the control of the exhibition whereas teamLab has intentionally made their exhibition in a way that the visitor is always controlling the behaviour of the projections. They are doing this by having sensors that detect whether there is something else than a wall the light is being projected onto.<sup>32</sup> Once it detects that there is a person there, it will react to this with changing what is being projected. With this a case of mutually being controlled and

---

<sup>27</sup> Bruno, *Surface* p. 3

<sup>28</sup> Bruno, *Surface* p. 32

<sup>29</sup> Bruno, *Surface* p. 32

<sup>30</sup> Mondloch, *Screens* p. 23

<sup>31</sup> Mondloch, *Screens* p. 24

<sup>32</sup> This is highly complex and intelligent technology that goes beyond both mine, and surely many others ability and skillset to comprehend, although I have tried.

being *in* control, as well as seeing and being seen emerge that affect both the visitor and the exhibition. It is a more compartmentalised way of looking at the relationship between the visitor and what is projected in comparison to Bruno but the essence is the same, that the relationship between the two is important for the experience.

The artworks in teamLab Borderless are made to communicate and interact with the visitors. It speaks with the visitors by changing the flow of light according to what the visitor chooses to do in meeting with the surface. Examples of this are:

1. The visitor walks to part of the room where they can see some flowers bloom. The visitors wonder (but most already know) what happens if they touch an empty part of the surface. By doing that the visitor watch a flower grows out from the space they are touching, almost as it would grow out of their hand.
2. Once the visitors have seen this, they start to walk against a different part of the room. As they walk, they for example look down to the floor and sees that it is covered with flowers. They turn around to see if they have been walking on flowers this whole time and discovers that that the flowers dissolves, or flows away, much like they would do in a flower field in autumn with the wind.

What you can see with these examples are that teamLab Borderless is blurring the lines between subject and object, because there is not that much that tells us what the subject is and what the object is anymore. “*It is an active site of exchange between subject and object.*”<sup>33</sup> & “*It is a fabric of projections.*” This is two of the sentences Bruno use to describe the surface and it describes teamLab Borderless good as well. Bruno states that once you step into this space of projected light it makes you *be* in that space.<sup>34</sup> You exist in that space, or you become a part of that space which again can point to the mixing of the roles between subject and object. Not only does the visitor exist *in* the teamLab Borderless space, but they also exist *as* that space. Suddenly the visitor becomes the space they are meant to observe, that’s when the visitor role shifts to being the object. Further the space, by registering the visitors, becomes the subject as it senses the visitor as an object and from that sensing performs actions from analysing their movements and placement. With these examples you see that the roles of object and subject are constantly shifting, changing and the both the visitor and the space exists as both subject and object at the same time. The direct distinction between the two does not exist.

---

<sup>33</sup> Bruno, *Surface* p. 8

<sup>34</sup> Bruno, *Surface* p. 67

One could argue that once the visitors immerse themselves into this exhibition or haptic air of light they surround themselves with, the borders of what is a part of it or not, the subject and the object, become fluid.<sup>35</sup> What I take out of this is that the visitors insert themselves in the position as the object once they start to interact with the projected light, yet they continue to keep their status as the subject simultaneously. They could become the space, the canvas, the wall, the architecture once they insert themselves in the light. They become watched, not only by the technology but the other visitors as well. The borderless exhibition needs the visitor seeing it, and by seeing it being able to interact with it and change the course of it, as it changes the course of them. There is a sense of mutual intimacy in this relationship.

If we move on to Kate Mondloch and her take on experience, she proposes that the spectator has a much bigger role to a screen reliant artwork where the artwork is reliant on the spectator gaze and movements much like teamLab Borderless is built. In many ways it lies in the quite literal grammatical word “subject”, that translate to a person or a thing in a sentence that performs the action.<sup>36</sup> She also proposes the concept of here and there in relation to cinema. Shortly, Mondloch explains the spectatorship whereas viewers should be “Here” as embodied subjects in the material exhibition space, and “There” as observers looking onto screen spaces.<sup>37</sup> Already, a nod in the direction of focusing on the spectator rather than exclusively focusing on the exhibition or the object is clear. If that is the case you could argue that the action, movement, or atmosphere of the artwork, or what gives the artwork life *is* the subject or body of a visitor. The difference here is that this argumentation does initially point onto separate roles of subject and object, as opposed to Bruno who’s approach of blurring the separation.

Mondloch is most clearly trying to bring the body and mind of the viewers into the discussion where she sees that it has been excluded earlier.<sup>38</sup> Already in the introduction chapter she mentions something that is key to the understanding of her book. “How one sees is just as important as what one sees”.<sup>39</sup> It is in the core of this book that attention is very powerful and

---

<sup>35</sup> Bruno, *Surface* p. 69-71

<sup>36</sup> <https://snl.no/subjekt - grammatikk>

<sup>37</sup> Mondloch, *Screens* p. 62

<sup>38</sup> Mondloch, *Screens* p. 34

<sup>39</sup> Mondloch, *Screens* p. xiii

influential.<sup>40</sup> teamLab is emphasizing this through their projects by always focusing on the visitors presence and attention to their surroundings.

Further you could say that Mondloch looks at the experience of viewing screens inside an art gallery and how this might shape both the artwork and the spectator, or the space, through the interactions with the screens. These screens she quickly states can be almost anything, glass, architecture, three-dimensional objects and projected images to mention some.<sup>41</sup> To me, this opens up a whole discussion around the material and the immaterial and as Mondloch also briefly writes a screen can function as a connective interface to virtual space.<sup>42</sup> With this she explores the relationships between viewers, the screen and sites where she uncover that the surface no longer only is a material surface but also an immaterial one. Although, if this is the shift that she proposes and is convinced is a new way of thinking, I cannot agree. To me this in several ways reminds me of other theorists such as Gadamer, Didi-Huberman and Boehm that focuses on the particles that floats in the in-between in different ways. Which all discusses the unexplainable power of the space between the artwork and the spectator, that does not relate to time, and that give the spectator an experience of some sort. There is a viewer-screen interface as Mondloch calls it, that connect the viewers and the mechanisms for screening such as the projectors teamLab actively uses in their space. This is the in-between, the immaterial, that in many ways can are the focus of the spaces that teamLab creates. This can be seen through the many videos of people trying to not only touch the walls or the floor, but also the air and the need to exist in the light that is projected in these spaces.

Bruno sets museums side by side with cinemas, claiming that they both share a cultural sensibility and that they are much alike because of their close connection to the term hapticity.<sup>43</sup> Which again strongly connect the human body to the space of cinema or museum. This is where teamLab Borderless fits in, as it in many ways can be seen as a hybrid between a cinema and a museum. It allows the visitors to move freely to explore as you often do in a museum, but at the same time it has the most fundamental element of a cinema, projections of video. With hapticity Bruno is discussing an affair of public intimacy, as it is what makes us able to get in contact with the things, spaces and motion around us. Although she does not

---

<sup>40</sup> Mondloch, *Screens* p. 35 & 47

<sup>41</sup> Mondloch, *Screens* p. 2

<sup>42</sup> Mondloch, *Screens* p. 2

<sup>43</sup> Bruno, *Surface* p. 144

only limit this to the outer world but also to our mental motion and our sense of feeling our own movement in space. There is a relationship between motion and emotion according to Bruno.

When looking at intimacy, especially in a context of art Bruno explores intimacy in public three-dimensional spaces. Throughout the book the reoccurring factors to intimacy and connectivity between a visitor and the artwork Bruno claims has to do with movement, memory, and the body both in physical form, but even more in the form of the mind. Bruno states that haptic experience of place interacts with memory.<sup>44</sup> With this you could argue that memory must be connected to intimacy simply because memory is one of our most intimate functions we possess as a human being. Our memory is affective, and because memory connects to both emotion and motion Bruno states that cinema and museums, are places of mental imaging and mnemonic palimpsests.<sup>45</sup> This means that there are intricate layers of memories or experiences in the surface of these spaces waiting to be interpreted by each visitor, or a “mapping space” as Bruno calls it.<sup>46</sup>

When looking at intimacy we should not forget the very much physical aspect of it. Maurice Merleau-Ponty wrote a piece in 1964 that looked at our senses in a more technical way, but still connecting it to intimacy. First of all, it seems like Merleau-Ponty is trying to embody and validate the senses by using words as “Our fleshy eyes”<sup>47</sup>. The eyes Merleau-Ponty writes as something intertwined with the body through movement stating that vision and movement are connected, pointing to the painter birthing a painting.<sup>48</sup> With this he connects the flesh, the body, and our senses with the mind. Further Merleau-Ponty uses a mirror to show how our senses are embodying what we might already have a vague idea about, making it physical once you stare at it in the mirror. It is as he is trying to say that nothing is truly real before we *actually see* it. To Merleau-Ponty the tactility of anything is key. This is an interesting thought as opposed to Bruno that speaks of intimacy in a more abstract way that can exist in our mind. Although they both concludes much in the same way that the connection between

---

<sup>44</sup> Bruno, *Public Intimacy* (Massachusetts & London: The MIT Press, 2007) p. 21 & 15

<sup>45</sup> Bruno, *Public Intimacy* p. 21, 22 & 16

<sup>46</sup> Bruno, *Public Intimacy* p. 20

<sup>47</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Merleau-Ponty Reader* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2007) p. 356

<sup>48</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Merleau-Ponty Reader* p. 353, 357 & 358



movement and the physical body and the mind is there and heightens and embodies the concept of intimacy.

A big part of why the exhibitions behaviour but also the visitor's behaviour changes when they meet, is that most visitors often get self-conscious. That is not unique to this exhibition, but how the relationship develops between the exhibition and the visitors is interesting. As the visitor becomes conscious of themselves, they point their eyes inwards by thinking about their place in the exhibition and space. This again, is blurring what can be seen as an object or subject, because in the instance of becoming self-aware and self-conscious the subject makes themselves an object at the same time.

Mondloch talks of something she calls exploratory observing.<sup>49</sup> It shows or encourages a self-conscious experimentation.<sup>50</sup> This shows that it is not only Bruno that is interested in the inner connection and consciousness of the viewer or visitor. Mondloch is exploring the effects of giving the visitor the choice of determining<sup>51</sup> how long they can spend time on an exhibition and given a sense of freedom. She claims that the experience will always be incomplete,<sup>52</sup> which is why giving visitors a sense of freedom is so influential to their experience. If we look at teamLab Borderless exploratory nature where everything is up to the visitor, maybe that is why it is so successful.

The projective components combined with the dark and big rooms create this immersive world that shuts everything else out. As a visitor you can get lost in these huge rooms as you have no maps and are simply forced to explore this together with the other visitors. teamLab Borderless is claiming to connect the visitors together.<sup>53</sup> These spaces are very intimate spaces that touches people individually by allowing them to explore both internally but also the space itself. Yet these spaces still give people a sense of connectivity to other visitors and the technology as they share the experience and space. As a result of this intimacy, naturally, touching of the surfaces inside teamLab borderless occurs, and with that, the sensing of others

---

<sup>49</sup> Mondloch, *Screens* p. 41

<sup>50</sup> Mondloch, *Screens* p. 42

<sup>51</sup> Mondloch, *Screens* p. 55 & 43

<sup>52</sup> Mondloch, *Screens* p. 47

<sup>53</sup> [https://www.teamlab.art/e/borderless\\_odaiba/#highlight](https://www.teamlab.art/e/borderless_odaiba/#highlight)

mood or emotions too. Both touching and sensing others can do just as much to change the experience of something like teamLab Borderless. There is not anything that speaks against this as there is no secret that the visitors watch each other and what the consequences of other's actions are in the exhibition. This is according to both Bruno and Merleau-Ponty a natural response to existing. Intimacy is the key to experiencing artwork and the world because you must be connected to your own self in order to process and analyse the impressions. There will always be some sort of contact. Bruno continues to say that the sensing of surface cannot be separated from the experience of self as a perceptive being.<sup>54</sup> This again underlines the statement that intimacy, experience and processing information are connected.

With the body comes a certain flow, movement and sensing that mirrors the movement of the exhibition, although the computers and projectors does not have the ability to be self-conscious, it still mimics the same sort of behaviour. With that meaning that the machine translates the flow and movement of the visitor into its own flow of projecting reactions on a surface. teamLabs own statement for the installations in the Borderless exhibition emphasizes that their intention with the installations and their "scripted" purpose is to actively have a bond between the visitors and the artworks:

*"...the body has its own sense of time... Artworks move out of the rooms freely, form connections and relationships with people, communicate with other works, influence and sometimes intermingle with each other, and have the same concept of time as the human body... The borderless world transforms according to our presence, and as we immerse and meld ourselves into this unified world, we explore a continuity among people, as well as a new understanding of the continuity between ourselves and the world."<sup>55</sup>*

Bruno states that:

*"A joint world of imagination and affectivity makes itself visible on the surface as a connective, moving architecture... Affect... is not only a medium but is "intermediated."<sup>56</sup>*

&

---

<sup>54</sup> Bruno, *Surface* p. 85

<sup>55</sup> <https://borderless.teamlab.art/concepts/borderlessworld/>

<sup>56</sup> Bruno, *Surface* p. 18

*“There is a haptic rule of thumb: when we touch something or someone, we are, inevitably, touched in return... Touch is never unidirectional, a one-way street. It always enables an affective return.”<sup>57</sup>*

What I take out of this is that every touchable space like teamLab Borderless, has an internal effect on the visitor and their experience. What she is claiming here is that although the body is the part that must approach the space and visit, it mutually touches the spectator’s body and mind, through intervening with the spectator’s behaviour and satisfies the eyes. This means that although the happening when the spectator or body meets the space is temporal, it is very real and intimate. In many ways she has a point by claiming this, both the lifespan of a body and our newest technology is temporal, unknown, and unpredictable. Bruno lays out a valid point with claiming the materiality of the immaterial by emphasizing the temporality here. If we look back at the statement from teamLab, they seem to have a similar understanding as they claim the borderless exhibition have the same concept of time as the human body.<sup>58</sup>

This is where Bruno’s definition of surface becomes drastically different from the one you would traditionally relate to. Shortly explained, the traditional definition of surface is seen as what describes an artworks colour, texture, and overall looks, the top layer of narration of what we see. Therefore, the surface is the layer that is being judged and experienced of the artwork. Bruno talks about surface as something with a transformational character where the touch is closely connected to our inner self, and our inner self is fully sensed when it is formed by our outside experiences through affect or being formed or touched by our experiences on the outside.<sup>59</sup> Although the traditional surface still has a connection to the inner self in the form of analysing what we see and form a reaction and feeling to that, it excludes the part where what we touch and experience of a surface unlocks a piece of our inner understanding of ourselves. This surface in the case of teamLab Borderless give the visitor a new sense of time, or more accurate confuses the visitors experience of time. The visitors are aware that a flower does not grow, blossom and wither in the matter of minutes, or even seconds as they do in the Borderless exhibition. Yet quite a few talks about how they lost track of time and did not realise they have spent their whole day inside the exhibition before the closing announcement came over the speakers. This projection of a different sense

---

<sup>57</sup> Bruno, *Surface* p. 19

<sup>58</sup> <https://borderless.teamlab.art/concepts/borderlessworld/>

<sup>59</sup> Bruno, *Surface* p. 20

time combined with explorative mind clearly affect our inner sense and self. This close haptic relationship between both the inner self and the external impressions shows again that motion and emotion is closely connected, much like what Bruno states.<sup>60</sup>

Paulsen differentiate between spectator and observer by pointing out the significant differences Jonathan Crary has written about in “*Techniques of the observer*”.<sup>61</sup> In the small excerpt she points to how Crary explains that both spectator and observer have an important difference in definition of the words they are rooted in; the latin word *spectare* that points to a passive onlooker which you would typically see in galleries and traditional theatres or sitting at a sidewalk café watching a bypasser.<sup>62</sup> A spectator looks and take in what is happening in front of them, but do not know any more than what they see nor are they interested in more either because they are passive. The latin word *observare* is pointing at someone who sets themselves into a system that tells them more about the understanding of a situation or its limitations by complying to the set of rules, codes or practices that may comply.<sup>63</sup> This point more in the direction of intervening from the side of the observer, in which the observer must be more invested, interested or willing. It is most natural to take the direction of calling the visitors of teamLab Borderless observers rather than spectators in this case because a relationship between them is formed once they step into the rooms as earlier stated and concluded.

On the other hand, a different take on the word spectator comes with the investigation of the nature of spectatorship in Mondlochs book. There she emphasizes that the media object manages the relationship as something mutual that both the exhibition and the visitor benefits from and is relying on. This relationship between the visitor and the screen is considered to matter.<sup>64</sup> What is said here is that when something makes visitors become aware of their own existence, or the nature of spectatorship it will always matter, and always be an important part of experiencing. What is different with this opposed to viewing other artworks, like a painting or a sculpture, is according to Mondloch that it includes a screen and a certain amount of

---

<sup>60</sup> Bruno, *Surface* p. 144

<sup>61</sup> Paulsen, *Here/there* p. 93

<sup>62</sup> Paulsen, *Here/there* p. 93

<sup>63</sup> Paulsen, *Here/there* p. 93

<sup>64</sup> Mondloch, *Screens* p. 18 & 19

space that *demands* attention.<sup>65</sup> You cannot ignore the type of environment that surround you inside teamLabs Borderless, it occupies a space *in* you and *around* you and stays there until you get out of that said space. It can even remain mentally, but in a different way, through memories. Mondloch sees this as exclusive to media/screen spectatorship, although I cannot agree with that. That is because the self-awareness and sensibility to the surroundings can be provoked with other works of art as well. The condition, as I would put it, is that if it creates a relationship with the visitor that makes them be more self-aware, it does not matter if it is through a screen or through a painting, because the effect is still the same; the visitor is being affected, making memories, thinking about their role in it, or having an emotional reaction.

Paulsen states that this relationship that is being made between the visitor and in this case, teamLab Borderless, is due to the power of the sign, or index which is able to put the visitor into a real connection to the contextual situation.<sup>66</sup> She also strongly compares this relationship to Barthes *punctum*. In *Camera lucida*, Barthes divides our reading of photographs into two parts; the *studium* and the *punctum*. The *studium* is most easily explained as something coded to everyone and connected to culture, as something polite.<sup>67</sup> That also means that the viewer is seeing the cultural connotations and is forming a context or interpretation from that of the clothes, the setting, or the hairstyles. The *punctum* is rather something different and quite personal, it is a matter of loving and not liking. It is coded directly to you personally and is only for the individual. Barthes is defining it as something that sting, speck or bruises by accident. It comes from a moment of surprise and remembrance and is not depending on culture or anything but your own love for it.<sup>68</sup> It cannot be balanced and is provoking an unexpected and unconscious connection to your mind and memory.

If we put this into play with the teamLab Borderless exhibition, the index according to Paulsen, does not rely on materiality or physical touching. This is because it is based on facts and its ability to force itself upon others mind, therefore it can be seen as an event.<sup>69</sup> Yet in the case with teamLab Borderless or any case of exhibitions, there is some sort of tactility that is important as a factor to reach the visitor. The index relies on tactility to be seen as based in

---

<sup>65</sup> Mondloch, *Screens* p. 21 & 23

<sup>66</sup> Paulsen, *Here/there* p. 28

<sup>67</sup> Barthes, "Extracts from Camera Lucida" in *The Photography Reader*. Ed. Liz Wells. London: Routledge, 2002 p. 25 & 26

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* p. 25 & 29

<sup>69</sup> Paulsen, *Here/there* p. 28

reality. Like Barthes *punctum* which force a reaction bound in the unconscious individual mind, the index is an event that contextualize sign, referent, and receiver in a temporal moment in the present. It is a matter of relationality, interpretation, and decision but at the same time the power lies within the visitors themselves and their ability to interpret and give meaning to what they see.<sup>70</sup> It has to touch them personally.

## 1.2 Affordance and script; sensing the machine

Once we have discussed the art of experiencing the screen and media-based exhibition teamLab Borderless and the concept of *viewing*, *spectate* and *observe* it is natural to also look at the technology's limitations and the concept of affordance. This to see what the exhibitions limitations are in terms of the technology but also to look more into what defines the limitations that the technology has. The term script will in this context be more present as it will show to be closely connected to affordance. The term of scripting will in this subchapter be about the intended use that the creators wrote into the work teamLab Borderless and how this can both limit and enrich the screen media-based exhibition. With the term script Kjetil Fallan claims that this instruction manual is not only connected to technical object as Akrich describes it as, but to the design of everything created and how this can cast a light on how to understand the relationship between producers, users, designers, and products.<sup>71</sup> In this sense the script is seen as the instruction manual to any object or technology that is being launched into the consumer world, and a way into understanding why, how and who this new product work, functions, and is being received. The term scripting is seen in this case as the intention of teamLab Borderless technology and vision, and further how this is controlling the visitor and how the exhibition is viewed.

If we start to look at the role of the spectator Mondloch does state very early on that there is always a risk of controlling the spectators or visitors in an exhibition.<sup>72</sup> In the case of teamLab Borderless it is obvious that the visitor is being controlled or guided in some way when entering and travelling through the exhibition. Examples of this is how the projections are inviting the visitors to move with or follow a parade of animals and people through the exhibition, you could say that the figures are showing the visitors the way. The parade can be seen on some walls through the whole exhibition where there are people dancing or playing

---

<sup>70</sup> Paulsen, *Here/there* p. 29 & 31

<sup>71</sup> Fallan, *De-scribing Design* in *Design Issues*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (Autumn, 2008) p.63

<sup>72</sup> Mondloch, *Screens* p. 31

instruments or animals like moose or birds and bears walking peacefully through the exhibition. The way that the projections of flowers react to the visitors' touch gives them a feeling of control, but it is also an example of where these constant reactions are always keeping the visitor curious of what will happen next time or what happens if they do something different. Further let us not forget that the visitors are guiding the visitors, as people mimics and observe what other visitors do, but also where they move.

The manipulating of the visitor's body and mind to fit a specific script to get a desired result is not something new. Many before Mondloch has written about the effects of the screen and what happens to spectatorship when meeting screen interface such as Lev Manovich, Marshall McLuhan, and Rosalind Kraus. What differentiates the interpretation of this, is that some claims that this sort of interaction and spectating is making viewers passive and static.<sup>73</sup> Understandably some concludes with this when watching people watching screens, especially when it is in relation to television or cinema, we all know the saying we heard as a child; "If you watch too much tv, your eyes will become squared!". I understand that this saying is a tactic to less screen time, although I find this an old school, ignorant and a naïve way of thinking. By now there is a lot of factual counter sayings to this that claims otherwise, such as Mondloch's whole book on screens. But it is also visible findings here that shows that a screen of any sort not necessarily always forces the spectator to become a drooling zombie with squared eyes. With looking at teamLabs Borderless installation, you can clearly see the visitors getting influenced to movement, to inner dialogue and exploration through the way they change their behaviour once they enter the installation, even though they are being regulated, or some might say, manipulated. Although it is what we can call artificial behaviour it is nonetheless *different* or *unusual* behaviour that creates something within the visitor such as feeling happy, fulfilled, content, but it also creates something inside the installation.

What is a bit more unsure is if the intended wish from the creators side of connecting people together gets fulfilled in this space as much as they intend to. The reason for this is that, yes, in an indirect way visitors connect with others in the way of seeing the cause and effect of someone else's movement. And yes, they might be tempted to mimic movements others have done before them, but there is little evidence in either promotion videos, Instagram posts or

---

<sup>73</sup> Mondloch, *Screens* p. 34

walkthroughs on YouTube where visitors talk and directly interact with other visitors except the ones they already know. This might be seen as proof that the scripted usage of the Borderless space might not be as impactful as the creators hoped and advertised for. The question, if this is the case, would then be if it is to be seen as negative or not and for who which is not that important as the point would be that it is being used.

Mondloch claims Jonathan Crary is part of previous dominant narratives that encourage a static and inactive subject that apparently has no mind or body of their own in the role of screen-based spectatorship, they are controlled by the screen and/or programmed script of the technology.<sup>74</sup> With teamLab Borderless there is behaviour as earlier shown with leading visitors through with the technology that support this way of seeing screen-based spectatorship. Although this way of manipulating and tailoring is not exclusive to screen spectatorship. I want to claim that this scripting is used in very much everything that is targeting an audience or consumers of any sort. There is nothing that is being made without the intention of reaching someone or something. An example to prove my point would be a coffecup is made for those who drink coffee, and the coffeecups handle manipulates the drinker to hold it in a different way than when its without usually.

Although there are successful ways of manipulating people as shown above, there is also examples of scripting something and then something else happens other than what was intended or expected. Running shoes and shoes for example. Running shoes were ultimately made to make running more comfortable and effective for those who wear it, protecting the foot better. Yet with shoes comes an unexpected but known problem. Our whole way of moving either we are walking or running is changed from hitting the ground with the front of our foot first, to hitting the ground with our heels first. What this does is that it demands more of the shoes because when changing the way we walk we need more support, more attenuation and shock absorption from the shoe, because the natural attenuation you get from running and walking on your toes disappears.

This shows that manipulating to change people's behaviour to get a desired result, as they do when something is scripted, cannot be seen as a negative thing necessarily since it is in everything made, but it is very unpredictable. Mondlochs negative attitude towards this feels a

---

<sup>74</sup> Mondloch, *Screens* p. 35



bit misdirected and hypocritic because when she is talking about spectatorship she writes that this way of making an installation, is something that comes with wanting to place the spectator “inside” the installation so that they become a part of it.<sup>75</sup> By inserting the visitor as a central role of an exhibition you walk away from the one-way flow of information and into a more interactive two-way flow of information.<sup>76</sup> To insert a visitor inside an installation so that communication can happen is to manipulate the visitor to do something you want even if it would make the visitor more active or not.

When it comes to inactivity or passiveness Paulsen use the term of telepresence and spectacle. She describes telepresence using Douglas Engelbarts explanation of it; “the feeling of being present at a remote location by means of real-time telecommunicating devices”.<sup>77</sup>

Furthermore Paulsen explains the term as being present in real time but not in real space and similar to this Benjamins description of aura which describes “the unique phenomena of a distance no matter how close it may be”.<sup>78</sup> In that way a screen does not make those who watch it unable to do what they are supposed to, but it emphasizes the fact that you are not actually there to feel the room, smell the smells or feel the temperature of the air. An example of this can be the zoom meetings we all have been through the last couple of years, where students are having classes online watching the professors PowerPoint on their computer screens and in some cases are able to see the other students in smaller frames also watching the professor. Here it is very clear that the students are not actually in the same space as the professor, yet they share the same timeline and have the same purpose; to learn and listen. It is the same when people are visiting museums through their virtual tours, they are there in real time, but not in real space.

Paulsen points out a very direct example of medias limitation by using several television-based art performances.<sup>79</sup> There it is shown that through the television, the viewer is placed outside always looking in, and that what is depicted at the screen is out of reach. This presents an interesting take on the screen and technological limitations in the 1970’s. The world of technological inventions has been developing a lot since the 1970’s and some might say that

---

<sup>75</sup> Mondloch, *Screens* p. 24

<sup>76</sup> Mondloch, *Screens* p. 24-25

<sup>77</sup> Paulsen, *Here/there* p. 2

<sup>78</sup> Paulsen, *Here/there* p. 71

<sup>79</sup> Paulsen, *Here/there* p. 104 & 105

television cannot be compared to the technology we have today. Yet the technology today is still based on the same basics; light projected from or on a surface in a given space with a delay that is not always noticeable, but it is there. These are limitations that can also be noticed in teamLab Borderless even though they aim to be borderless. As a visitor in their space, you must wait for some time before the technology reacts to your movements or actions, there is not the instant reaction you get from being in nature itself, this might cause the visitor to become impatient, or aware of the fact that it is artificial. A second thing is that what happens in the exhibition cannot happen without a screen with projections. It cannot exist without electricity. The artwork can be cut off and removed from, or changed in the space it inhabits by turning of the light and electricity, it seems odd to think about that the artwork can be removed and replaced so quickly. This also means watching the works online either through their website or Instagram, it is all screen based. The artworks inside do not come completely without borders as the creators claim either. They are still contained behind the walls of the building although they move more freely within them. If we should think about the works of art as something that travels and lives beyond these walls, we cannot do that without saying that all artworks do, because they always travel in the visitor's memory. This again goes against the creators definition of the exhibition as their view is that "regular" artworks does not travel beyond their walls or frames.

Paulsen claims that the image or the screen is a place in itself.<sup>80</sup> She discusses screens as sites, for political resistance.<sup>81</sup>

Numbing<sup>82</sup> The screen as being numbing or passive viewers is although not exclusive to the screen. The term spectacle is described not only as what we watch on screens and through mass media, but more generally as a happening where people see something happen but remains distanced to it which makes them not intervening or not wanting to participate.<sup>83</sup> This spectacular culture emphasize the passiveness and inactivity as it describes the technologies that supports or base themselves on mass communication rather than intimate relations to what is being presented or the presenter, but also the power of the spectacle as something that immobilizes people even when there is actual danger. The most famous example of this

---

<sup>80</sup> Paulsen, *Here/there* p. 107 & 108

<sup>81</sup> Paulsen, *Here/there* p. 15

<sup>82</sup> Paulsen, *Here/there* p. 83

<sup>83</sup> Paulsen, *Here/there* p.71-73 & 77

would be the murder of Kitty Genovese witnessed of more than 30 neighbours, but not one intervened, or to sit at a full bus stop and see a stranger struggling after falling on the ice but not helping, thinking others will help instead.

When looking at teamLab Borderless in relation to the passiveness that was newly discussed, the exhibition can and will not ignore the visitor, and the visitor will not become passive. This is because the visitor cannot experience the exhibition without having to move, watch, imitate and analyse both the exhibition, themselves, and other visitors. It is built in such a way that it is attentive and sensitive to the visitor, much alike the visitor itself. One could argue that this way of behaving is just as artificial as the exhibition itself, since the movements are mimicking exterior behaviour that is provoked by artificial feedback and that further connects with the inner consciousness of the visitors. Mondloch brings up this when looking at Dan Grahams work *Present Continuous Past(s)* from 1974.<sup>84</sup>

---

<sup>84</sup> Mondloch, *Screens* p. 36 & 39

## Chapter 2: The concept of value historically and its development in the context of art

teamLab Supernature is one of the many other exhibitions teamLab displays. This exact one is in the Venetian Macao, a big five-star hotel holding one of the world's biggest casinos. With a size measuring 50725 square meters of gaming space, holding 3400 gaming slots and 800 gaming tables for 6-9 people each, there is no doubt that the flow of people and money is enormous.<sup>85</sup> This building clearly mirrors the use of the whole region Macao, which is based on the concept you see in Las Vegas. It is located in China and based most of its economy and business on casinos, so naturally the number of casinos and big luxurious hotels are many and if you read a top ten or top 20 lists of the biggest casinos in the world, you will quickly notice that Macau casinos dominate the lists.<sup>86</sup>

If we take a closer look at the location Macau, China it has some similarities with Odaiba where teamlab Borderless is located. They are both man-made to make the area and economy grow, both by building more theme parks to draw more people. In Odaiba it was through infilling combining several small islands that it became what it is today, a big entertainment and amusement district including a Ferris wheel, giant malls, and exhibition spaces. In 1989 Macau was also being expanded by infilling the area between the Macau peninsula to include the two islands Taipa and Coloane and what was water area between these. Although what is a bit different about Macau is that the Macau-region has independent economy and was formerly a Portuguese colony but was transferred to Chinese administration in 1999.<sup>87</sup> Because of this the region has two official languages, but also has a large degree of autonomy and has its own currency; Macanese pataca.<sup>88</sup> The region has almost no import and export as its main income is tourism. It consists of mainly short term stays from Hong Kong which is based in casino operation. They were already known for the casinos and gambling in the 1850's, but this industry grew immensely when China took over the administration in the late 1990's.<sup>89</sup>

---

<sup>85</sup>: <https://www.casino.com/blog/news/biggest-casinos-in-the-world/>

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> <https://snl.no/Macao>

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

Although there are some similarities between the locations Odaiba and Macau, there is more focus on the flow of money in Macau. There you have what many will see as the symbol of finance economy, the gambling. In Macau the focus on finance and economy is largely visible and centralized in the region due to its many casinos. The casino has an image that is all about the money, both in positive and negative form, but most of all is that there are huge amounts of money in circulation if it is a casino nearby. You could say that the casinos are much the same as betting on the rise and fall of stock prices, as an example. Because in the same way as betting on stock prices, you bet on for example numbers on a rolled dice in the casino. The positives of the casinos being that there are big opportunities to win a lot of money. That is, if you are lucky, much in the same way as investing in stocks at the right time before the stock rises. On the other hand, the negatives are the possibility of you losing all the money you bet or invest are high, hence the huge amounts of money stored and in circulation in these places.

The philosophy of the casinos and the clearest business model is that when you as a visitor enter these buildings you will enter a dreamlike state where you forget/do not know how much time or money you spend. The most regular way to do this, in both Las Vegas and Macau, is by having no windows to stop you from recognising if it is day or night, and there are no clocks to keep track of time. With these simple means it is making it easier to keep you in there for hours and hours at a time. Therefore, the casino is the perfect space to install an artwork based on the lack of daylight and the use of artificial light in the form of projectors and spotlight, just as teamLabs Supernature is.

To start this chapter, I first want to explain what I mean by value. This because when looking at the installation in Macao it raises the question as to why it has been placed where it has been placed. Value is the most natural term and concept to look at when you see the location of the teamLab Supernature exhibition being in the middle of the symbol of finance economy; a casino. With value I mean that it is what we see as valuable to us in the artwork and in other parts of our lives and way of living. It can be determined by economics, emotional reactions to it and so on. It is often connected to politics, social life, virtues, religion, upbringing, and culture. With no value an artwork or an object is just an empty body without a soul. Its significance to us individually or as bigger unit becomes unimportant. There is also a tendency where the more people seeing an artwork as aesthetically, culturally, religiously or ethically valuable, the higher economic value it has. Is it the value from culture, social norms and virtues that makes an experience valuable, or the money attached to it? Art is usually

situated in a space where it is supposed to be experienced, be seen, be heard. A space like this more traditionally is a museum or gallery that contains other works of art. That make it seem like there is a higher power that chooses what is allowed into the space that shows the valuable artworks. But does that mean that artworks that are not taken into these institutions or environments cannot be viewed as valuable artworks?

One of my positions in this dissertation is that in many ways art institutions and museums are one of the biggest organs for valuing and making value out of objects and art. They often have sponsors or shareholders who in many ways holds quite a lot of power in the form of economic support. They are often completely dependent on these shareholders, sponsors or donations of economic sort. This is why the institutions must convince the supporters that what they are investing in is valuable. They also have to convince the public that what they hold is valuable for our culture and society.

To dive into the discussion around the teamLab Borderless experience and the teamLab Supernature exhibition in Macau and why it is valuable to us, the historical context of value and art is just as important as the here and now. When looking at traditional museums versus this new extremely popular museum in Tokyo and the exhibition in Macau the most natural way to look at this must be to look at the historic context of value. From there the next step is to see if and how this view of value and art has changed up until today. How can you look at art and value, how does it fit with the capitalistic views of earning the highest possible profit for the least amount of cost, and does teamLab Borderless really stand out from other museums here, or is it mostly the same philosophy as other traditional museums? Ultimately this chapter is about the value of spatial experience and the institutional and environmental influence.

## 2.1 Looking at commodity as phantasmagorical form

First let us talk a little about commodity and how to define what a commodity can be in historical terms and further development into the art field later. The reason why commodity is an important concept to discuss here is that when looking at the locations the teamLab spaces are located in, there is a strong connection to the flow of money which commodities are a big part of in today's society. It is therefore natural to explore the connection commodities can have with art and art institutions when the locations are this rooted in economy. In Marx'

book *Capital*, Marx states that a commodity is an external object or thing that satisfy human wants.<sup>90</sup> This commodity can be material or immaterial, and the quality can vary. Marx explains that a use-value which can be translated into value that is only associated with consumption can further also have an exchange-value in which varying use-values can be traded into other use-values of different proportions.<sup>91</sup> Meaning that this perspective stresses how value can be defined in objects through labour and materials and further be traded with other things of value. Further it points to the fact that commodities are constantly shifting in value depending on who wants them and are rather phantasmagorical as they are shifting in appearance, and often deceptive. Mainly this is because of the change in demand.

You could say that the perspective that only considers the cost of labour and materials when deciding the price, or value, of the commodity in question is the most ideal and preferred way if the workers are to be treated most fairly. In theory you could say that this is the most traditional or easiest way of looking at commodities and determining the value. Marx talks about this to lay emphasis on the fact that most often this way of setting value to things is not the case, either in his time or in our time where capitalism thrives. As Marx goes through the different aspects of a commodity, he is criticising capitalism and point to the fact that there are more to the trading of commodities in the capitalistic world than labour and material costs.

The critique lies in the fact that often the workers making the garment is unfairly paid for the amount of work they are doing, and even worse when comparing it to what the commodities are sold for. Many connects capitalism to modern slavery, whereas the exploitation of people in the workforce stands at the cusp of it. Underpaying, and keeping people in extreme poverty by paying as little as 40 norwegian øre per garment is reported in for example SHEINs factories.<sup>92</sup> This causes the workers to take double or even triple shifts whilst at the same time SHEIN is also making billions yearly on selling cheap garments to the western countries.<sup>93</sup>

---

<sup>90</sup> Marx, *Capital* p. 3

<sup>91</sup> Marx, *Capital* p. 4

<sup>92</sup> [https://www.nrk.no/urix/rapport\\_-flere-arbeidere-i-kles-suksess-jobber-triple-skift-1.15728919](https://www.nrk.no/urix/rapport_-flere-arbeidere-i-kles-suksess-jobber-triple-skift-1.15728919)

<sup>93</sup> [https://www.nrk.no/urix/rapport\\_-flere-arbeidere-i-kles-suksess-jobber-triple-skift-1.15728919](https://www.nrk.no/urix/rapport_-flere-arbeidere-i-kles-suksess-jobber-triple-skift-1.15728919) & [https://www.kapital.no/reportasjer/2022/09/14/7925632/shein-er-kinesisk-klesprodusent-som-kopierer-zara-og-andre-merker-og-er-lite-baerekraftige?zephir\\_sso\\_ott=hDUW2g](https://www.kapital.no/reportasjer/2022/09/14/7925632/shein-er-kinesisk-klesprodusent-som-kopierer-zara-og-andre-merker-og-er-lite-baerekraftige?zephir_sso_ott=hDUW2g)

When looking at commodity and value there can be an even bigger disconnection between the “true” value and the actual price when they enter the marketplace. When looking at setting a price to a commodity, the use value and the exchange value are the two key aspects, but when taking a closer look Marx points to several things that happens in addition to this. Firstly, you cannot only consider the workers in the equation, you would also have to consider the owners of the company that also would want a payment for investing time and money into the company run which is responsible for paying for both the workers and the materials. Secondly, if a brand reaches a higher status due to good marketing or a higher demand due to popularity for example, the problem, as Marx points out, is when the payment to the workers barely covers their basic living expenses, and the rest of the profit earned from selling the commodity goes to the bourgeoisie.<sup>94</sup>

A contemporary example of when the marketplace and a brand that has done excellent brand building clash to make the ultimate capitalistic profit is Prada. Prada, a luxury brand selling shoes, clothes, and other accessories were rated badly in 2018 and again in 2020 and 2021 for not protecting their workers.<sup>95</sup> Where this was exposed it was reported that Prada were more likely to use workers that was under forced labour and workers that was vulnerable to exploitation, as they will not disclose their supply chain. With not providing this information it leads to the assumption that they are using a web of recruitment and factories, which is often affiliated with modern slavery.<sup>96</sup> That means that even though the brand Prada are pricing their product much higher than most others that are selling the same product, the money does not reach the workers. Some workers might even not receive payment for the work they are doing as they might be under debt-bondage, which means that they are trapped in poverty because their work is their security for paying their debt, and with that they lose control over both their employment conditions and their debt.<sup>97</sup> This expose showed that quality does not mean equality, and even worse, that Prada gets away with it because consumers believe that the price they are paying must mean that the workers that made the products are being treated fairly, when in fact they are treated worse than the workers for H&M, because they have been forced to change for years by scrutiny.

---

<sup>94</sup> Marx, *Capital*

<sup>95</sup> [https://knowthechain.org/company/prada\\_2021/](https://knowthechain.org/company/prada_2021/) & [https://knowthechain.org/company/prada\\_2021/#score-history](https://knowthechain.org/company/prada_2021/#score-history)

<sup>96</sup> <https://www.fastcompany.com/90279693/did-a-slave-make-your-sneakers-the-answer-is-probably>

<sup>97</sup> <https://www.antislavery.org/slavery-today/modern-slavery/>



A commodity can also be goods that are not even in the slightest necessary like a pair of shoes or bread and are purely to human satisfaction. These are goods like diamonds, or a tv, something that has a made-up value and idea of being necessary to be happy and satisfied. An example is the value of diamonds which is in the sense of rarity practically nothing, and it is not that hard to get a hold of. It is DeBeers, that some call the diamond cartel, extremely well thought out marketing that made the diamond valuable. Through introducing a diamond grading system in 1939, and extensive advertising through for example the slogan “A diamond is forever”, the ultimate sign of eternal love. First they suggested that a month salary was what you should spend on an engagement ring, before it in the 80’s was suggested to be two months’ worth salary through advertisements showing a woman with a ring on her finger and another showing just the ring. This was a way of setting value to an object that did not necessarily have a value determined by rareness or age or material and who made it. It is making value out of a fictional necessary good to express love. It is the ultimate example of setting a price and manipulate something to become a more valuable commodity.

## 2.2 Art as commodity, and what comes with it

The historical context of the value of *art* will start with Walter Benjamins writings on art and the development at the start of the reproduction and mass production era with the essay “*The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility*”<sup>98</sup>. When connecting the term commodity to Benjamin, he discusses the value of art and how it might develop with time. He has come across as very negative to this new era of photography and reproduction of art and a lot of that stems from the statement; “Even with the most perfect reproduction, one thing stands out: the here and now of the work of art — its unique existence in the place where it is at this moment”.<sup>99</sup> When looking at the text on reproduction you can see that with the age of reproduction a democratic thought emerges, even when the aura of an artwork disappears. What is often not taken into consideration is what Benjamin writes after this when talking about photography. He writes that theoreticians asks the wrong question when asking if photography is art. He believes the question should be whether art has undergone a fundamental change in itself. And this distinction is what this chapter will focus on ultimately when looking at art as commodity.

---

<sup>98</sup> Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility*

<sup>99</sup> Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility* p. 5

By aura most easily you could translate it to cultural, ritualistic value in the artwork. With that I mean the value in an artwork that comes from tradition, developed through time, and what is truly the essence of the artwork is its specific placement in time, space and place. Inherent in the artwork is the ritual, often the religious ritual. “The ‘one-of-a-kind value’ of the ‘genuine’ work of art has its underpinnings in the ritual in which it has its original, initial utility value”.<sup>100</sup> This is the first hint of Benjamin drawing a line between art and commodity by using terminology as utility and value. Further reading of the text shows that Benjamin is starting to connect the idea of art being *more* than a ritual, *more* than a unique thing to enjoy by some but not all, in a place that is religious like a temple.<sup>101</sup> Laying emphasis on the *more than* a ritual is a conscious choice of words because Benjamin quickly claims that from artistic movements like ‘art for art’s sake’ a negative idea emerges that art should be ‘pure’ and with that secluded from social function.<sup>102</sup> The point is that art now should be functioning as *more* than being beautiful, or ‘beautiful pretence’<sup>103</sup> as it reaches more people. Now art becomes something that more people can enjoy, in their own home or in more “common” places like the cinema, the newspaper, the subway, it becomes more democratic as it reaches more people, and with that, it becomes more like a commodity.

This idea of art reaching new places, and new people brings new functions whereas the cultic value that comes from the ritual transforms or alters into display value.<sup>104</sup> The display value being the ability to be shown to the masses, which is what happens in teamLab Borderless. teamLab Borderless reached a record holding number of visitors at their location alone but reaches even more with their account on Instagram. Further this means that art can exist in more than one place at once, more than one space at once, and with that more than one time at once. The masses can experience these installations both when being there physically, but also online. It is progressive as Benjamin claims in the sense that an artwork has less social significance in the form of expert opinions, and yet reaches greater masses of people.<sup>105</sup>

What is a bit different from other traditional exhibitions though is that teamLabs artworks are much more rooted in the trends of today. With that I mean that they are growing popularity on

---

<sup>100</sup> Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility* p. 11

<sup>101</sup> Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility* p. 12 & 13

<sup>102</sup> Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility* p. 11

<sup>103</sup> Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility* p. 20

<sup>104</sup> Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility* p. 13

<sup>105</sup> Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility* P. 26

social media, especially Instagram. People share that they have visited because it lies some sort of pride in being there. Other exhibitions have some of the same tendencies for example with people sharing a picture of them seeing the Mona Lisa in Louvre, Paris but teamLab Borderless is reaching a whole new audience of people that are not regular museum goers. They reach people that wants "a good pic for the gram", something that contributes to their own aesthetics on their personal Instagram profile.

Even though you would consider teamLab Borderless and teamLab Supernature progressive in the light of Benjamin in the 1920s, spaces like these are today more widely spread and advertising on social media has become normal. And this is not exclusive to teamLabs spaces, and other spaces like these, but museum spaces in general are taking steps to reach out to more and more people through means like social media and Instagram. With this shift where the relationship to the masses changed, and the participation changed, Benjamin concludes that we are free to explore and be adventurous, together.<sup>106</sup> This is what teamLab Borderless is aiming to do, they are aiming to let people explore. Not only in the way that people gather to explore together, but also that teamLab branches out to more than one location, like both Odaiba and Macao to reach out to even more people. There is value in that, both in an economic view and an art historic view in the sense that it becomes a larger flow of money, but also a larger flow of people. When looking at teamLab Borderless Instagram posts though, I can see that there are some inconsistencies to what they say is their aim. They are aiming for the collective experience, enjoy your time with others in the museum but when they are promoting themselves, they publish photos of influencers that are offered to be there alone. They are let in before or after their regular opening schedule, so that they can capture the best pictures, unhindered and undisturbed. These findings are problematic in the sense that teamLab with this are working against their own vision, which can come off as a bit hypocritic.

To stay relevant, visible and popular it is important for the museums that they can distribute their art and make people connect with them and believe that what they are seeing, and often pay to see is something valuable. The way to do that is by exchange, the currency of money to a non-cash currency like an artwork or the experience of an artwork. They frame the artworks and by that also themselves into what they believe will be most profitable, they create value

---

<sup>106</sup> Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility* P. 29

through presentation, or display value<sup>107</sup> as we can call it. The choice of artworks a museum is exhibiting are linked to much more than a cycle of cultural importance and the need to document the past for the future. That might have been the case before but primarily what Benjamin is saying is that art now has display value instead of ritual value and therefore, naturally, that is what museums focus are on as well.

The art institutions functions as a mirror to what the current focus in society is. The museums are not busy picking the most valuable object to store for the future, the display value is even more important, and have been for a long time. The museums are busy running an operation that not only makes capital into cultural capital, but also cultural objects and art into capital to profit on through the display value and focus on quantity over quality whereas quantity is the new quality.<sup>108</sup> In many ways this is the same critique that also Marx is writing about. That the work that is put into the commodity in question somehow does not count that much, and that quantity is more important than the quality of the commodity, simply to earn the most profit. This emphasizes one key thing that Benjamin brings up in his text; “It has always been amongst art’s most important functions to generate a demand...”<sup>109</sup> Now, art is here as a commodity to generate a demand that can translate into money.

If we look at teamLab Borderless to compare it is undeniable deeply connected to global money, capitalism and some big corporations, and there is no doubt about it. You could see this through the choice of locations for teamLabs projects, including the Borderless project situated in a corporate building, but also other projects like the one in the casino in Macao and another at Singapore airport. All situated in tourist-packed areas, full of a constant flow of people. Earlier I thought that this might be something to criticize, that it was isolated from the more traditional institutions, in the sense of operating a museum or art institution, but it is not that easy. In fact, the way teamLab Borderless operate is quite like the way the traditional museums operates in these terms. The most closely related museum to compare with must be the MUNCH museum in Oslo. A museum that has had the more traditional characters both in terms of art collections, but also in architecture. Recently this museum was moved to an all new building in a new location in Bjørvika. A rich, business and tourism area with lots of new

---

<sup>107</sup> Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility* p. 13

<sup>108</sup> Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility* p. 32&33

<sup>109</sup> Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility* p. 30

developments that was non-existent before the 2000s.<sup>110</sup> Not so unlike what teamLab is doing with many of their projects, and teamLab Borderless as it is now moving to a new district in Tokyo; Azabudai.<sup>111</sup>

### 2.3 Museums as financial institutions laundering money

As we go into the concept of thinking about museums and art institutions as financial institutions, we can start by looking at what opinions Joselit has of Benjamin. Joselit writes that Benjamin's publication has become a roadblock. Joselit claims that Benjamin can hardly account for the revolutions that has come with media.<sup>112</sup> What is said there, is that Benjamin should not be included in further current discussions of image production, after the arrival of media like television, mobile phones and the internet. In that he includes the misconception that Benjamin is very, if not completely negative about the new age of reproduction. Joselit states that Benjamin believes reproduction of art is the absolute worst fate of any cultural object or content.<sup>113</sup> He does this without explaining any closer what other statements that comes from Benjamin after the loss of the aura, which I believe is crucial to bring into the discussion of reproducibility and value. Because once you see that Benjamin also in his way acknowledges that art is more easily accessible, and that it through its change in nature, changes the society in a more democratic angle, Benjamin once again can be included in further discussions around art and media.

Joselit states that we have to move away from Benjamin to value the art of today, but a closer read on Benjamin's essay will show that he is still very much relevant in the discussions today.<sup>114</sup> The reason for claiming Benjamin's relevancy today is that as Joselit states, museums appear to democratize the uneven distribution of wealth that results from late capitalism's high risk finance industries.<sup>115</sup> Meaning that the vast amount of profit accumulated from capitalism, that Marx would claim to be an unfair payment to the bourgeoisie, is justified by investing in art that is then exhibited in museums to the people. It is seen as a way of giving back, and with it gain a social status as an elite donating for public

---

<sup>110</sup> <https://snl.no/Bj%C3%B8rvika>

<sup>111</sup> [https://www.teamlab.art/e/borderless\\_azabudai/](https://www.teamlab.art/e/borderless_azabudai/)

<sup>112</sup> Joselit, *After art* p.13

<sup>113</sup> Joselit, *After art* p. 15

<sup>114</sup> Joselit, *After art* p 13

<sup>115</sup> Joselit, *After art* p. 86

benefits.<sup>116</sup> Further Joselit states: “museums make wealth fascinating, and hence culturally legitimate.”<sup>117</sup> Even though the reason for showing art to the masses is for personal gain it is still in a way democratising because it reaches more people.

Benjamin does not talk about museums when he mentions what emerges with reproduction, but he does talk about the emerging democratic concept that comes with reproduction of images through photography. Meaning that with display values entrance in art, it is shown to the masses, not only to a few. This is what Joselit overlooks and forget to take in consideration when stating that Benjamin cannot be part of modern discussions about cultural objects. Either Joselit fails to see that Benjamin is more nuanced in his thinking around photography and the new age, or he knowingly leaves this bit out of his discussion, because it does not fit into his view of both Benjamin as outdated but also ruins his narrative around the theme.

Joselit does build on the concept of art as commodity that Benjamin proposes. There Joselit sees art as an international currency and set arts stability in value up against the world instable economy, where currency quickly is explained as something that moves freely to transfer value and fast.<sup>118</sup> Joselit proposes that art has a cultural diplomacy, which can be connected to his thought of art being a stable international currency.<sup>119</sup> By using the term currency and putting that in the context of value and international economy, Joselit is claiming that art is a commodity to be exchanged, and further can be used as a currency due to its cultural diplomacy. When looking more into this Joselit proposes a model that show how value is created;  $\text{Contact} + \text{current} = \text{currency or power}$ .<sup>120</sup> With this he is trying to establish a link between the connection between an artwork and the viewer to global circulation of images. He divides the links into four: to citizen, to community or institution, institution to state and state to globe. They all create value when connected, and staying connected is key. The connectivity produces power that only belongs to a group, and only in 'f that groups stand together.<sup>121</sup>

---

<sup>116</sup> Joselit, *After art* p. 86

<sup>117</sup> Joselit, *After art* p. 72

<sup>118</sup> Joselit, *After art* p. 1 & 2

<sup>119</sup> Joselit, *After art* p. 6

<sup>120</sup> Joselit, *After art* p. 59

<sup>121</sup> Joselit, *After art* p. 95 & 96

The thought of museums as financial institutions comes from the concept of value and art as international currency. It is about the museums and the institutional power of connectivity and distribution. In David Joselits *After Art*, he states that

*“Assigning meaning is merely another way of setting an artwork’s price in the currency of knowledge, transforming it into a certain kind of commodity for collectors to buy and for museums to “sell” to their audiences.”*<sup>122</sup>

With this you could say that museums are distributing artworks as valuable objects, in which the museums are putting on the “pricetag”, and by that also the commodity value. They are branding the artworks and making them a commodity where the value is determined by the museums in the terms of for example its rareness, its age, its material, its given experience, or the much discussed *who* made it.

It is clear that every museum is dependent on some outsider influence and contributions<sup>123</sup>, so this is a question that is applicable to any museum or art institution. Even if you click into some well-established museums websites many of them will have a dedicated DONATE or SUPPORT button. When connecting the notion of museums as distributors of wealth, or so-called image banks<sup>124</sup> it leads to the critique targeting the choice of museum in this thesis. As stated in the introduction, several people viewed teamLabs Borderless not as a museum, and would advice against the possibility of looking at it in an art historical context. Mostly because the group and the concept were branded as commercial entertainment rather than something that gives an aesthetic experience. This with emphasis on being commercial entertainment, you would instantly think that it is all about the best annual turnover and having a capitalistic vision. Although when seeing the traditional museum as image banks and wealth distributors as Joselit suggests, teamLab Borderless, and teamLab Supernature ultimately has the same vision as the rest of the museums.

In an article written during the pandemic it is explained that museums as the Louvre, the MET and the Barnes Foundation in Philadelphia has had an enormous increase of visitors online to their website and that many museums during covid were using this to potentially get more funding. Here it is shown and stated that museums across the world, as those mentioned

---

<sup>122</sup> Joselit, *After art* p. 46

<sup>123</sup> Joselit, *After art*. p. 86 & 87

<sup>124</sup> Joselit, *After art* p. 70

above, has been forced to find ways to make an income during the pandemic, and also are heavily encouraged by both governmental institutions as the culture secretary in the UK and tech-companies to invest time into “pursuing every opportunity to maximize alternative sources of *income*” and “harness a whole new set of *funding*”.<sup>125</sup> And further “As the world becomes more digital, there are lots of *financial opportunities*. Museums just need to look at how they harness that in new ways.”<sup>126</sup> Here the tone and narrative is once again pointing to museums being financial institutions looking for ways to earn more profit.

But the search for ways of getting more funding through more commercial ways is not new from this pandemic. The MET has been hosting a charity ball to raise money to their fashion department for years. Packed with the biggest celebrities in the world, the ball draws an immense number of both donations and viewers through for example social media. As an example of the sums of money New York Times reported back in 2018 that the ticket price was around 35.000 USD.<sup>127</sup> Suddenly the traditional museums do not seem so unlike teamLab and their choice of locations. This shows once more that it is important for the museums to be conscious around how they distribute and shows the art. What teamLab is doing by being so open about the fact that they are connected to corporates is that they are claiming their own space of openness. They are in a way removing themselves from the secrecy that the “regular” or “traditional” museum does with the “*laundrying process*”<sup>128</sup> as Joselit calls it, by putting themselves in the open about the sponsors and who is paying them to create the exhibition. By doing this they rewrite this idea of what museums are and what they hold. In that way, the focus will be at the experience the visitors get from visiting and the value it creates for every individual involved.

When talking about the “*laundrying process*”<sup>129</sup> there is a few arguments that speaks for the statement that teamLab is doing the same as traditional museums in terms of using art as

---

<sup>125</sup> Article from artnet <https://news-artnet-com.cdn.ampproject.org/c/s/news.artnet.com/art-world/museums-digital-content-revenue-1944362/amp-page>

<sup>126</sup> Article from artnet <https://news-artnet-com.cdn.ampproject.org/c/s/news.artnet.com/art-world/museums-digital-content-revenue-1944362/amp-page>

<sup>127</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/03/fashion/what-is-the-met-gala-and-who-gets-to-go.html>

<sup>128</sup> Joselit, *After art*

<sup>129</sup> Joselit, *After art*



commodity. As Joselit states, and this can be used in terms of many other countries as well; “American museums is engaged in a massive money-laundering operation: turning finance capital into cultural capital and putting a democratic face on the accumulation of wealth..”<sup>130</sup> teamLab seems to be more open about the fact that they are dependent on corporations and capital. You can see that teamLab is connecting their financial dependence by the choice of locations, for example the location of teamLab Borderless, which was situated in a corporate building owned by MORI building company, a firm that is doing property management and development and one of the leading real estate developers in Japan, according to themselves.<sup>131</sup> Further this exhibition will be moved to a new area also developed by MORI; the Azabudai Hills in Tokyo that aims on bringing people closer together by providing every facility one would need, in a city within the city.<sup>132</sup>

Even more relevant is the exhibition teamLab Supernature in Macao. If we take a look at the location of teamLab Supernature in Macao, it is physically, on top of the flows of capital by being situated in a casino, the symbol of finance. There is something almost comical or even taunting about it, as teamLab exposes the logic prevalent in any art institution today by using a location like this. Traditional museums are also situated in wealthy districts of either business or tourism. Examples like earlier mentioned MUNCH museum in Bjørvika, Oslo, but also the National Museum at Aker Brygge in Oslo, yet there is no one questioning the choice of locations or their legitimacy as an art museum as opposed to teamLabs museums and projects. What teamLab is doing by being so transparent in the means of their connection to global capital is that they give exposure to the logic of the art world. What I think is interesting with teamLab in this exact topic is that they are basically forcing both visitors and scholars to think about what the definition of a museum is and further what defines a valuable aesthetic experience.

From a critical perspective the transparency can be seen as problematic in terms of how it appears being incorporated in a big business model that is just there for the money, and not for the sake of exhibiting “valuable” art. But, if we believe what traditional museums and institutions present themselves as, should we not believe what teamLab present themselves as? Should we not believe that they have ambitions to change something in the industry of

---

<sup>130</sup> Joselit, *After art* p. 71

<sup>131</sup> <https://www.mori.co.jp/en/business/>

<sup>132</sup> [https://www.mori.co.jp/en/projects/toranomon\\_azabudai/](https://www.mori.co.jp/en/projects/toranomon_azabudai/)

exhibition and exhibition value? All of these questions raised might be proof or at least a hint that maybe it is not just the culture or a community that decides what is valuable or not, and there might not be culture or social norms and virtues that makes artwork valuable. I suggest that it is the speculation that museums are doing by taking in, exhibiting, and valuing art. This you could compare to speculation in finance in the form of trading stocks. This is against many theories and ideologies that suggest free will and art for art, but there is more and more that shows that money will infiltrate culture and art in the same way it infiltrates anything else in the capitalistic society.

What is important to remember here is that connecting art institutions so deeply to finance and global economy does not have to be something negative. Joselit is claiming that museum industry is one big business of distribution exactly like other entertainment industries, only more sophisticated, and that this should be seen as a unique power that should be used to, for example, build the self-image of entire nations.<sup>133</sup> The power he claims museums have is something no individual can have, it belongs to a group, and only in that groups stand together.<sup>134</sup>

---

<sup>133</sup> Joselit, *After art* p. 89 & 91 & 93

<sup>134</sup> Joselit, *After art* p. 95

## Conclusion

### What type of experiences does teamLab Borderless generate?

This thesis has in the first chapter explored and discussed the behaviour of the projections as well as the behaviour of the visitors in the exhibition teamLab Borderless. It has also uncovered that there are ways in which projection-based art manipulates the visitors in certain ways. Ideas on screen and experience has found the following; When, in the perspective of Giuliana Bruno, looking at light, it is possible to see it as something that wraps around the visitor, which can affect their mood both positively and negatively. This show that when visiting an exhibition like teamLab Borderless, a connection is formed between outer factors like the space we stand in, and our inner workings. The effect of this is ultimately the same for artificial art and traditional art, which is that the connection to the mind will be present when going into spaces that exhibit art. What Kate Mondloch explains is in essence the same as Bruno, but with a different take whereas a mutual relationship of being controlled and being in control is formed, laying emphasis on the importance it has for the experience of the exhibition.

What we found in the teamLab Borderless exhibition is that the roles of object and subject are constantly changing or being present in the visitors and the artworks as the same time. You see this because both the visitor and the technology are both sensing and observing, as well as being sensed and observed. The visitors exists both *in* and *as* the space, and they become the space once they begin to interact with it. The space equally becomes the subject as it observes, senses and proses information to develop a reaction to what it sees. It is an intimate symbiosis of seeing and be seen that focuses on both the visitors and the exhibition.

Ultimately this show one thing and that is that the artwork is dependent on the spectator to exist and that a certain attentiveness to the surroundings is crucial to experiencing art. This does not only apply to teamLab Borderless, it applies to most installation based art.

When thinking about sensing the surroundings the connection between motion and emotion comes up as it is equally important to be attentive to. Here it is discussed that motion and emotion is connected by our memory as it is the most intimate thing about a person. The opposite is the physical part that is contributing to heighten the concept of intimacy as tactility is the key to making a memory map. All artworks have the ability to travel in the visitors

memories. This intimacy you have when connecting art to memory is key to experiencing art as you must be connected to your inner self to process information and impressions from the exhibition but more importantly in life. When thinking about the tactility and the effect it has on the experience, you could say that every touchable space is a two-way street in the sense that the space just as much as the visitor touches. When a visitor is touching the projected surfaces in teamLab Borderless, the projections touch the visitor back. The Borderless exhibition gives an intimate experience in the sense that it unlocks something about the visitor inner self by for example confusing them with the idea of time and how fast something grows and blossom.

The experience that teamLab Borderless provides is not a static one, it is a dynamic journey through the relationship between body and mind as it is constantly demanding the visitor to look at their own position in the exhibition. Not only that, but the technology can not be ignored, it demands attention constantly and occupies the space both around the visitor as well as inside the visitor. Yet this is not exclusive to screen spectatorship. Kris Paulsen talk about the index and the importance of tactility there. The instant connection between the inner unconscious to a photography describes as punctum points to the matter of loving, not liking something when seeing art. This too is a take on how art occupies space, and maybe even a unexpected amount of space within a spectator.

When thinking about how the visitors experience can be affected by the other visitors Bruno concludes that it is a natural response to observe and mimic others. The aim of teamLab Borderless of being a space where people connect is fulfilled here, but it is not exclusive to the exhibition. In many ways the visitors of an exhibition will always be connected to somebody else as long as it is designed to hold more than one at once. What is somewhat special with teamLab Borderless is that it allows people to explore the space but also the space within themselves at the same time. It allows visitors being self-conscious and self-exploratory whilst the machine mimics the visitor's behaviour. This mimicry, that is the base of the exhibition, is a translation of movement or the flow of people. The relationship between visitor and technology manifests itself as a dialogue of movement between the two. The exploratory observation that looks at what happens when the visitors are rid of guidance is indeed very much present in this exhibition. This gives a positive feeling of freedom, and ownership to the exhibition.

Yes, a screen can be many things, but the meaning of it is not only reduced to being a surface as Bruno says, neither an interface connected to technology as Paulsen suggests. I believe it is both a surface and an interface that can connect anyone with anything. This thesis has shown with the use of theories around screens and experience that just because it is artificial and obviously manipulated does not make the experience any less real. It has shown that teamLab Borderless provides their visitors with different types of experiences such as all-consuming self-conscious spectatorship, Inner exploration, Physical touch and the ability to save it as an intimate memory, and the feeling of being in control.

When looking at teamLab Borderless' intended use or scripting it becomes clear that the intended connectivity to other visitors in the form of conversation is not that much present. Further when looking at how they try to manipulate the visitors in order to get desired result, we see that they guide the visitors with projections of animals and people, what is also guiding is other people in the sense that people are watching people. This could be seen as a type of communication between visitors, but ultimately it is just the matter of copying the movements of others. The manipulating of visitors in order to get a desired result is shown to be present in other parts of life as well, with the emphasis on that manipulation does not always have to be a negative thing. Here the examples of coffee cups and running shoes shows both successful manipulation and unsuccessful.

The limitations that present themselves in the discussion is the problem of being there in real time but not in real space, again pointing to it being artificial. The onlookers are also always on the outside looking in to something once there is a screen involved, and things such as delay can make people impatient and aware of the technology being present. The statement of media being numbing or encouraging passiveness is not applicable to teamLab Borderless. Both visitor and technology are attentive and sensitive to each other and the experience can not function or exist as it is scripted if it were not for physical movement but also inner movement. Through a short discussion it is concluded that screens does not necessarily equal passive onlookers, with teamLab Borderless it is the opposite; it is engaging. There the screens are encouraging movement and action through projections motivating the visitor to touch or move themselves. This behaviour is artificial but it creates a different behaviour that further creates feelings of for example accomplishment or wonder. The body of the visitor is seen as a computer mapping sensory information and processing information will always continue within the visitor once they enter an exhibition.

## What type of value do we ascribe to experiences like the ones teamLab generate?

By diving into the museum practice of valuing art we can see that when looking at the term commodity historically from Karl Marx in 1867, to Walter Benjamin in 1936 and lastly Joselit in 2013, there is something about the definition that shifts with the perspectives. In Marx' book *Capital*, Marx states that a commodity is an external object or thing that satisfy human wants.<sup>135</sup> The key in this definition is that commodity can be traded. But it soon become more complicated with capitalism. There is more to value than cost of labour and materials in a capitalistic society like the one we live in. There are suddenly more factors that determines the cost of buying a commodity which does not reflect the cost of labour and materials. Like the demand of the product and its popularity. In this perspective everything has a value of some sort. Everything has a given price but can be unfairly priced in the hands of capitalists. When going more into contemporary examples of capitalistic exploitation it easily shows that the cost of a product does not reflect quality or good working conditions. These examples are SHEIN, producing low quality garments under bad conditions and more shockingly Prada, that is exposed of using methods that is often associated with modern slavery. This concludes that quality does not mean equality and exposes a problem that comes with good branding; they get away with it due to their own steep prices because people believe high price=good conditions.

If you further step into the term of commodity with Benjamin in mind, he stretches the term to be used in the art world when looking at the new mechanical reproduction in his time. There it becomes apparent that art no longer only has a cultic value occurred from a ritual but serves a different purpose once it is able to be reproduced, the value is now measured by the ability to be shown to the masses. When this focus changes in art, naturally the museums will also change their focus. It becomes something more that focuses on democratic values such as reaching more people; more like a commodity. This is being compared to teamLab and their ability to reach out to a bigger group of people through Instagram quickly stating that it is a more common practice today, advertising on Instagram. teamLab is creating value both in economic sense and art historic sense through making their exhibitions more available.

---

<sup>135</sup> Marx, *Capital* p. 3

Ultimately museums functions as a mirror to the current focus in society. Art functions as a way to generate a demand that often translates into money. You can see this by the locations that teamLab uses; Macao and Odaiba. Gambling city and business/entertainment district. There they are selling experiences to visitor as regular tourists, gamblers and businesspersons. Although teamLab is not the only ones using their location for selling art as commodity. MUNCH recently moved to a business and tourist district right here in Oslo, proving that the search for higher profit and better exposure is present in traditional art institutions as well.

Lastly spinning further on museums and the financial practices Joselit states that museums makes wealth fascinating, which justifies the unfair differences in earnings by donating to the public. This seems to be more visible with the traditional museums rather than with teamLabs spaces that are more based in finance and the concept of speculation. What is then touched upon is the concept of using art as international currency, and the way that museums are assigning value to artworks and by that setting a price tag.

The traditional museums like The Met and The Louvre usually have dedicated donation buttons on their website, this shows that they are just as much dependent on money and contributions at teamLab and are so called image banks. The most famous example at the moment being the annual MET gala, raising money to their fashion department by inviting a lot of celebrities causing an immense amount of exposure. You could say that the annual turnover matters for all, which you can see in an article talking about how many museums were forced to look for alternative sources of income during the pandemic using terms as *financial opportunities*.

This leads to the laundering process that is turning financial capital into cultural capital. There it shows that with teamLab Supernature situated in a gambling region, it physically highlights the flows of capital and gives exposure to the fact that this is the logic of the art world. Yet the legitimacy of the museum and their art is questioned although regular museums as MUNCH in Bjørvika does the same, only with a less heavily influenced location as Supernature in Macao. This seems like an obvious conscious choice from teamLabs side as they are challenging the definition of museums and aesthetic experience with their locations.

By going through this transparency that follows teamLab, it is led to believe that museum speculation of value compared to finance speculation with that stock market, is what is assigning value to art, and experiences like the one in Macao and Odaiba. But there are more

ways in which teamLab is creating value; They create workplaces, they create more tourism and flow of people through the places they exhibit and with that they increase the flow of money, currency, transactions.

With this last chapter the essence is pointing to the fact that art is not just art anymore, based on cultic value to be worshipped by few. Art has become a commodity, traded by individuals, museums and nations. But that does not have to be a bad thing as art now has the ability to be seen, heard and experienced by more people. With this perspective you could say that art has become *more* than just art. As it is being commercialised and made a commodity it reaches more functions, and more people. Functions like entertainment, savings, investing property and symbols of nations.

If there was more time, this thesis would have gone deeper into the concept of art as international currency. A suggestion on further research is to look at how art fit into the stock market, this with terms like transaction looking even more into art as investment, a method of saving and possibly as a role in tax evading. How deep does finance sit in art institutions? And what happens to artworks and their value as they enter the stock market?



## Literature

Benjamin, Walter. *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility* (London: Penguin books Ltd., 2008)

Bruno, Giuliana. *Surface: Matters of aesthetics, materiality, and media*. (Chicago & London: The university of Chicago press & The university of Chicago press Ltd. London, 2014)

Bruno, Giuliana. *Public Intimacy: Architecture and the visual arts* (Massachusetts & London: The MIT Press, 2007)

Fallan, Kjetil. De-scribing Design: Appropriating Script Analysis to Design History in *Design Issues*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (Autumn, 2008), pp. 61-75

Joselit, David *After Art* (Princeton University Press, 2013 New Jersey and Oxfordshire)

Marx, Capital. Volume 1. (London: Lowe & Brydone, 1967)

Merleu-Ponty, Maurice. *The Merleau-Ponnty Reader* (Northwestern University Press, 2007, Evenston Illionois Edited by Ted Toadvine And Leonard Lawlor)

Mondloch, Kate. *Screens: Viewing media installation art*, (The university of Minnesota Press 2010, Minneapolis)

Paulsen, Kris. *Here/There Telepresence, touch, and art at the interface*, 2017, the MIT press, Massachusets institute of Technology, Cambridge Massachusets.

## Weblinks in list of appearance

<https://www.teamlab.art/about/>

[https://www.teamlab.art/thought/borderless\\_odaiba](https://www.teamlab.art/thought/borderless_odaiba)

<https://hypebae.com/2019/8/teamlab-borderless-planets-art-museum-tokyo-japan>

<https://www.timeout.com/tokyo/news/teamlab-borderless-takes-guinness-world-record-for-the-worlds-most-visited-museum-071421>

<https://www.greece-is.com/news/ancient-perfume-recreated-for-archaeological-museum-exhibition/>

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/30/scents-of-antiquity-revived-for-exhibition-at-athens-museum>

[https://www.teamlab.art/e/borderless\\_odaiba/#highlight](https://www.teamlab.art/e/borderless_odaiba/#highlight)

<https://snl.no/subjekt - grammatikk>

[https://www.teamlab.art/e/borderless\\_odaiba/#highlight](https://www.teamlab.art/e/borderless_odaiba/#highlight)

<https://borderless.teamlab.art/concepts/borderlessworld/>

<https://www.casino.com/blog/news/biggest-casinos-in-the-world/>

<https://snl.no/Macao>

<https://www.nrk.no/urix/rapport -flere-arbeidere-i-kles-suksess-jobber-triple-skift-1.15728919>

<https://www.nrk.no/urix/rapport -flere-arbeidere-i-kles-suksess-jobber-triple-skift-1.15728919>

[https://www.kapital.no/reportasjer/2022/09/14/7925632/shein-er-kinesisk-klesprodusent-som-kopierer-zara-og-andre-merker-og-er-lite-baerekraftige?zephrr\\_sso\\_ott=hDUW2g](https://www.kapital.no/reportasjer/2022/09/14/7925632/shein-er-kinesisk-klesprodusent-som-kopierer-zara-og-andre-merker-og-er-lite-baerekraftige?zephrr_sso_ott=hDUW2g)

[https://knowthechain.org/company/prada\\_2021/](https://knowthechain.org/company/prada_2021/)

[https://knowthechain.org/company/prada\\_2021/#score-history](https://knowthechain.org/company/prada_2021/#score-history)

<https://www.fastcompany.com/90279693/did-a-slave-make-your-sneakers-the-answer-is-probably>

<https://www.antislavery.org/slavery-today/modern-slavery/>

<https://snl.no/Bj%C3%B8rvika>

[https://www.teamlab.art/e/borderless\\_azabudai/](https://www.teamlab.art/e/borderless_azabudai/)

<https://news-artnet-com.cdn.ampproject.org/c/s/news.artnet.com/art-world/museums-digital-content-revenue-1944362/amp-page>

<https://news-artnet-com.cdn.ampproject.org/c/s/news.artnet.com/art-world/museums-digital-content-revenue-1944362/amp-page>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/03/fashion/what-is-the-met-gala-and-who-gets-to-go.html>

<https://www.mori.co.jp/en/business/>

[https://www.mori.co.jp/en/projects/toranomon\\_azabudai/](https://www.mori.co.jp/en/projects/toranomon_azabudai/)