Summary

Towards a Responsive Aesthetics: Sensation, Self-Movement, Affect is an examination of the aesthetic potential in the embodied experience of digitally enhanced environments in contemporary media art. Of primary concern to this dissertation are artworks where the artistic exploration of the digital material is focused on exploring the potentials for generating a bodily felt experience of the exchange with a digitally enhanced environment – as opposed to those artworks that seem to primarily focus on the ‘novelty value’ of integrating technology into art. These artworks succeed in establishing a situation where the tensions that arise when digital and analog processes are combined, are integrated into the artwork itself, thus treating the tensions as artistic material. It is important to note that while the embodied interchanges between participant and artwork are advanced by the introduction of technology, it is not the presence of a digital element that determines this relation. Rather, the determining factor in these embodied situations is a reciprocal openness and receptiveness between participant and artwork. Based on theoretical discussions in this dissertation, I refer to this core element as ‘responsivity’. Following this, the dissertation uses the concept of ‘the responsive situation’ to represent the now, here, and with that is produced when embodied interchange takes place in digitally enhanced environments.

The theoretical foundation of the dissertation is of a phenomenological nature. Specifically, it draws upon theories that lie at the intersection between embodiment, corporeality, digital technology and aesthetics and as a result of the theoretical as well as the analytical analyses throughout the dissertation, I point to some of the limits to phenomenology by discussing the theoretical positions developed out of Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology.

In condensed form, the dissertation’s overall contribution may be stated as follows:

Combining theoretical discussion with in-depth analyses of select artworks, a core contribution of this dissertation is that it characterises a contemporary but as-yet
poorly defined potential when digital technology becomes part of an artistic experience: that it can be manipulated from the core to the interface and that it is open for participation. By examining the situation where one or more participants enter into an interchange with a digitally enhanced aesthetic environment, the dissertation manages to also characterise the embodiment potentials thereof.

The dissertation provides a detailed study of the topics of sensation, **self-movement** and **affect** as they are activated in the responsive situation. Each topic further holds the contours of motifs that, when combined, further specify the relational and dynamic qualities of the responsive situation: *processes of refraction* is a motif connected to sensation, *effects of force* is connected to self-motion, and the *unresolved tension between the ability to affect and be affected* is connected to the topic of affect.

Through the phenomenological approach, the dissertation contributes with reflections on the challenges that arise as a result of the complex and ephemeral character of the responsive situation that takes place in a digitally enhanced embodied environment. Embedding the theoretical discussions in close-readings of select artworks, the dissertation further offers a methodological approach to how one might execute aesthetic analyses that maintain sensitivity to the complex compositions of participation, embodiment and dynamicity in contemporary media art.