

TACTILE TACTICS IN 21ST CENTURY CULTURAL DISPLAYS

Bálint Veres

Moholy-Nagy University of Art&Design

veresbal@mome.hu

ABSTRACT: There is a long tradition to see museums and similar cultural displays as sites of knowing and self-education; and also as tools of political and ideological tuition, indoctrination indeed. The critical approach of new museology in the late 20th century launched a systematic revision of the social and epistemological role museums play in contemporary culture. New museology highly increased, or at least required, the self-reflexivity of cultural displays, however, an increase in reflexivity does not involve, in a self-evident way, an increase of intensified experience, which became crucial to our contemporary life, especially in the perspective of somaesthetics. Thus, more recent museological and curatorial approaches, oriented according to the corporeal turn in philosophy and social sciences, emphasize the effects and consequences of the sensorial range in use within cultural displays. The historically developed and therefore questionable social constructions, political status quos and epistemological pre-suppositions underlying museum displays are encoded already at the level of the sensorial modalities. Hence, a new critique of the cultural displays and representations will consider the sensorial spectrum available and targeted.

The museum was once considered a church, later a school, then a stage. Today, in accordance with somaesthetics, cultural displays can be conceived as physical sites of intersubjectivity and models of human environment relationship, in other words: social and ecological agoras. Mentalistic and educational tactics (like identity politics, national heritage issues, intercultural relations, etc.) are not *passé* at all, but the somatic dimensions of human existence need to be revealed through tactile tactics in the most important cultural institutions.

Keywords: somaesthetics, museum experience, new museology, multisensory exhibition, tactility

“a piece of cloth is only half-experienced unless it is handled, the visitors find it impossible to keep their hands off.”

(Collingwood 1955, 451)

“An object in a museum case’, he wrote, ‘must suffer the de-natured existence of an animal in the zoo.

In any museum the object dies – of suffocation and the public gaze ...”

(Chatwin 1998, 17)

1. Starting point: an example

In September 2013, during the Budapest Design Week, together with two of my colleagues, I had the privilege to encourage a team of art students to perform an exhibition intervention, hosted by the Museum of Ethnography, an initiative that is still rare in the Hungarian museum practice.¹ The museum invited us to be completely free in our approach to the task, and at first we deemed it as a double task. On the one hand, there was a chronological exhibition of partly folk, partly artistic, professional and industrial exhibition materials, under the title of *The living tradition of ryjy – Finnish rugs from a private collection*. On the other hand, the bustle of the Design Week and the freshness of art students’ creativity offered a good opportunity to reach an audience usually not inclined to visit an ethnographic museum.

Having reviewed our options and resources, we decided on constructing a set of small interventions amidst the original display of the exhibition. This “sensory trail” was oriented by the ideas of scale change, interaction, cooperation and multisensoriality, in particular to the relatively rarely employed sense of hearing and the consistently prohibited touch. The original exhibition was construed along the needs of an educated audience keen to welcome sophisticated narratives. Our aim was to create an alternative, which is non-narrative, non-linear, and non-systematic in terms of cognition while it enhances the sensory and creative capacities of the visitor and triggers a vitalizing experience. The original exhibit displayed a highly complex ethnographic knowledge about societal practices, culture and identity construction by showing the materials spanning almost half a millennium. We did not intend to compete with this concept; rather we wanted to intensify the physical presence of the artifacts and the authentic touch that can be drawn from historical items – corresponding to the respective ideas of Frank Ankersmit (2005). Drawing on Hans-Ulrich Gumbrecht’s ideas on “presence culture”

¹ Experiments in exhibition practice are far less rare among leading international cultural heritage institution than in the Hungarian context. To get a comprehensive look into museum experiments, see Macdonald and Basu (2007).

and “meaning culture” (Gumbrecht 2004), I can say that the goal of our intervention was to balance the production of an erudite meaning by the effects of sensory immersion, in other words to counterpoint the mentalistic side of the aesthetic experience by the other side, which is multisensorial and full of somatic intensity, just as Dewey described a full experience (1980, 35-57).

The result of our intervention can be considered satisfactory: it multiplied the number of visitors during its existence, and by the end, a knotted carpet was also completed made collectively by the visitors. Our exhibition intervention provided inspiration not only to the art students but to the museum professionals involved as well. It might not come as a surprise if I admit that the biggest controversy surrounded the question of touch. The main opponent, however, was not the generous private collector, Tuomas Saponen (who agreed surprisingly easy to allow some carpets to be touched under controlled conditions), but more the museologists, of course. We were perfectly aware of the fact that our modest action and the arguments triggered on a local level, go beyond themselves and lead to wider cultural anomalies, which I shall expound on below.

2. Debates in and about the museum

In order to place the arisen debate about tactile experience into an appropriate context, it is worth bearing the critical remarks of the new museology of the 1980's in mind (Lumley 1988; Vergo 1989; Merriman 1991; Bennett 1995; Macdonald and Fyfe 1996; Macdonald 1998); in parallel with developments unfolded in philosophy and social sciences under the title of *corporeal turn* (Turner 1984, 2012; Gallagher and Laqueur 1987; Tamborino 2002; Sheets-Johnstone 2009) much of which was later crystallized in the emerging project of somaesthetics (Shusterman 2008, 2012). These impulses led to a millennial museology discourse in which the theoreticians not only re-examined the social, political and epistemological roles of the museum, as initiated by new museology, but they also made a further step by review-

ing the sensorial range employed in cultural displays, assuming that historically developed and therefore questionable social constructs, political status quos and epistemological presuppositions underlying museum displays are encoded already at the level of the sensorial modalities (Butler 2003; Marsh 2004; Classen and Howes 2006; Dann 2012). Soon after the turn of millennium, a number of studies appeared in rapid succession in which scholars placed such problems in the focal point of museology discourse as tactile sensation, interactivity, multisensorial experience, immersion or cultural access for the disabled (Pye 2007; Chatterjee 2008; Candlin 2010; Levent and Pascual-Leone 2014). Over time, the theoretical debates were echoed in museum practices as well – largely due to the fact that the debates were not mere speculations but mirrored the real issues of the museum as an institution. One critic rightly described the situation, when she drew attention to the fact that with the pressures of practical life, institutions can not expect theoretical disputes to come to a standstill, because in a system of public funding, dependent on visitor numbers, museums “simply cannot afford to alienate their visitors”. (Candlin 2004, 71)

In this process, museums have moved away from the traditional mission of a unidirectional, didactic, monologist, educative activity that is carried on by showcasing distinguished objects of high importance, positioned in a way that helps to underlie or transmit a cultural identity desirable for the museum, even more so, for the political power that maintains the museum's existence. Today more and more museums define themselves as an interactive, dialogic, transformative, an intermediary space (Simon 2010), a physical site of intersubjectivity and a platform for modeling human-environment relationships. It is not only the visitor who allows himself or herself to be refined, by even multi-sensorial tactics for that matter, but the physical configuration of the exhibition and the knowledge accumulated in it also call for continuation or re-articulation either on an individual or a collective level. Thus, the concatenation of the sensory-interpretative-affective-performative-social actions

that occur in the exhibition space might not be conceived as self-evident, but rather as something in the “becoming”. (Ntalla 2012, 254-255) Consequently, the audience is not expecting to obtain determinants of a lofty cultural identity as much, rather they find chips and fragments for an endless reworking of an open cultural identity. (Foucault 1997)

21st century museums can have a special affinity for honing the above-mentioned self-description in cases when their collections consist of natural science items or everyday objects. In contrast, art is still surrounded by the mythologies of the genius, which makes it difficult to realize exhibition tactics of immersion and interactivity. Of this one could draw the conclusion that art and non-art museums approach the challenges of the new millennia with different tactics, but before answering much of the questions by overemphasizing the opposition between art and non-art collections, let’s take a look at the museum in the most general perspective, and return to the specifications only later.

It is well-known that classical modern museum has been defined by its collection that ought to be preserved, cared for and exhibited in a meticulous and quality-assured manner. The roles, however, that came with that approach, and the limited opportunities that have been offered to the audience by classical modern museums turn out to be less and less satisfying in the postmodern media industry, in tourism and consumer culture. The museum can overcome this problem if it defines itself not primarily by its collection, but rather by the specific relationship between the venue, the presented objects and the stakeholders, including the audience – as it was brilliantly demonstrated in the 2010 Marina Abramović MOMA retrospective. The crucial aspect of this relationship is the fact that the visitors’ experience is founded not only on what is exhibited, but partly on the museum space as a whole, partly on their own and collective body, and also to be more precise, on the interactions of these factors. This can be intensified to the utmost through the interplay of multisensory

tactics that have been considered a taboo from the viewpoint of the museum establishment.

3. Historical horizons of tactile tactics

Lessons learned from new research on the historical development of museums, notably the one conducted by David Howes and Constance Classen at Concordia University,² provide important insights into the conflicts of museum display and tactility, an opposition held as a natural and necessary fact despite its apparent origin in the 19th century museology mindset. The preceding centuries before the modernization of the museum are usually treated as a pre-modern period thought to be luckily exceeded forever, a judgment that is less and less sustainable today, and formulated precisely because this earlier period does not support the premise in any way that the so-called “lower senses” (*touch, smell and taste*) would be disqualified within museum culture. Furthermore, pre-modern museum practice does not support the conviction that *sight* is the alpha and omega of museum experience and the reduction or restriction of any other sensual modalities would be inherent. (Classen 2007) Classen demonstrates on a variety of examples – which are primarily derived from contemporary travel reports and correspondence – that the senses of touch, handling, sounding (instruments for instance), smell and even taste were actually frequent in early museums. Later, these have been identified by modern consciousness as immature, uncivilized, childish, or even bestial. The fleeting immediacy triggered by the interplay of the lower senses has been opposed with permanent sight and the consequent distancing gestures of reflection. However, the critical redistribution of the senses could only be done by challenging the cognitive potentials of the lower senses, including those cases where qualities unattainable through vision can be assured by touch,

² *The Sense Lives of Things: A Cross-Disciplinary Investigation into the Sensory Dimensions of Objects in Practices of Collecting and Display, 2002-2005; The Sensory Museum: Its History and Reinvention, 2007-2010; The Hands-on Museum: Transition Periods, 2011-2014.* <http://www.david-howes.com/senses/>

or when the sensations gained by one of the senses are verified by another sensory modality.³

The pre-modern museum practice of touching and handling inevitably raised questions on the other side: how can the physical integrity of the collection be ensured? How can the compositional stability of its spatial arrangements be warranted? And last but not least, how to prevent theft, how to prevent inappropriate touch? The guardians of early collections had to find satisfactory answers to these questions, however they found the cognitive value gained through touch to be so significant that they would rather take risks than to reduce collection display to sight alone. When today, considerations on touch seem to re-emerge, they always coincide, not surprisingly, with the rise of the old ethical dilemma: “How can museums reconcile their duty to preserve often fragile objects in optimum condition for posterity with the needs of a population for whom touch is of such importance?” (Cassim 2007, 165)

The far-reaching decision on the cessation of the early-modern protocol that included touch has been made by 19th century museums when they faced an extraordinary explosion in visitor numbers. “Look but don’t touch!” – the price for a broader democratic availability was a limitation in terms of sensual modalities within museum access. Hence more people were allowed to visit the shrines of sciences and arts following a more abstract conduct of a uniperspective inspection directed by discursive commentaries, instead of touch that offer not only a temporary experience of possession (although it is offered in a more abstract way by sight as well), but also a physical continuity, or as Maurice Merleau-Ponty called it, “the flesh of the world”. (1968, 130-155) The pre-modern museum, conceived as a “training” place for the social elite, gave its place to museum of “basic education” for the masses. The price paid did not appear

excessive, as the new museum politics proclaimed the glory of the nation state for the broadest social strata, and the new narrative of art history compensated for the losses as well. Today, however, these compensations seem no longer satisfactory, when ocularcentrism and logocentrism are questioned and challenged by perspectives of various studies from somaesthetics to neurobiology, from phenomenology to body culture studies. Increasingly, prestigious establishment museums, like Musée du quai Branly, Victoria & Albert, British Museum, Les Arts Decoratif Paris, to name but a few, reflect the abovementioned critical insights themselves by multisensorial experiments.

The epistemological implications of touch, and the habitual, bodily dimensions of understanding that go beneath interpretation (Shusterman 2000, 115-137) have been defended by various theoreticians: polymaths, such as Michael Polanyi (2005) and John Dewey (2008), or the psychologists, Heinz Werner (1948) or Daniel N. Stern (1985). However, today’s analysts arguing for the significance of tactility can rely not only on modern philosophical or psychological schools, or on contemporary natural science, but they can consider classical authors as well such as Locke, Goethe or Herder (see Pallasmaa 2005; Classen 2007; Candlin 2008). As Constance Classen notes, in contrast to the modern concept, before the 19th century, sight was held as superficial, childish level of inquiry, indeed, as a kind of entertainment in terms of the empirical learning conducted in collections. On the other hand, higher authority was attributed to touch and the complex modalities of multisensory cognition. (Classen 2007, 906) When today’s scholars speak out for the re-emancipation of touch, their most common argument in all cases is the recognition of its epistemological relevance. This is none other than the finding that haptic cognition, with its imaginative, speculative and affective aspects, is not superfluous, but part of a meaningful being-in-the-world. (Candlin 2008, 278)

³ “Until the eighteenth century at least – notes historian, Robert Mandrou – touch remained one of the master senses. It checked and confirmed what sight could only bring to one’s notice. It verified perception, giving solidity to the impressions provided by the other senses, which were not as reliable.” (Mandrou 1976, 53)

4. Tactility and status

As it is known, touch cannot be considered a modality as unified as sight or hearing. It contains a high number of physical aspects (pressure, surface, heat, motion, etc.), and it demonstrates the ambivalence and reciprocity that come into play between the sensing body and the sensed. This interplay is surrounded by broad socio-cultural meanings. Thus, in the tactile practices of pre-modern museums, a multitude of aspects, values and motifs formed a hybrid unity. (Classen 2007, 907) Magical or religious aspirations could be expressed through touch: stroking the statue of the ruler, the goddess or the lion, one could symbolically come into direct contact with beings very unlikely to encounter in everyday life. By touch, the sensing person received or believed to receive the powers of the sensed; or vice versa: by touch, special power could be given by the touching person to the object. Similarly, in the practice of relics in the pre-modern collections, the exhibited item might be conceived as a mediator of forces and dynamisms. However, it also uses its mediator status in a more profane context: wearing the hand marks of its creator or its former user, it makes contact with named or anonymous historical persons. It is a very special contact, since it is imbued with the potential to imagine, which goes hand in hand with such an undefined relation. (Candlin 2008, 287) Touch, of course, could be an expression of simple curiosity, but in times of the early collections it was held to be the reliable means of deep scientific cognition.⁴

Last but not least, touch is the gesture of possession; it establishes a direct relation between the touching and the touched. It refers back to the original relation of the collection and its collector, which is inherited later by the museologist. In modernity the right to touch is denied from the audience, but allowed for the museum professional, who acts as the representative of the pub-

lic or private owner and is reluctant to recognize the remains of his or her sensual curiosity, a desire for possession or even faith-based attachment, because at the level of professional museology, tactile action can be acknowledged legitimate only as a means of institutional work.

In her studies, Fiona Candlin points out the anomalies of the situation, while combining her insights in the field of museology with contemporary social policy issues, namely the problem of equal opportunity and cultural access for the disabled. (2004) Candlin's questions are disarming: how can the museum fulfill its social mission to provide extensive accessibility to its collection if its existing practice reflects a social image that does not meet the ideas of advanced democracies, because it excludes the disabled community, especially the visually impaired? What does the presence of a blind person do to the museum? What challenge does this morally irrefutable presence mean for the museum? And there's a reverse question: can a place still be called a museum, where you can freely handle the exhibited materials?

The tension between the questions is all too clear: the individual (regardless of ones physical abilities) wants to learn, experience and have fun in the museum, and has all the rights to do that. The museum, on the other hand, has the duty and obligation to care for its collection for future generations. These two aspects cannot be fully balanced if we remain within the paradigm of the museum experience founded on a subject-object relation.⁵ The reconsideration of the museum experience as multirelational and multidirectional that involves intersubjective, performative and atmospheric elements, in other words the conceptual involvement of intention-driven bodies and meaningful spatial situations in the creation of museum experience would add new aspects to the dilemma. Here, I cannot do more than to

⁴ Modernity could not justify the hybrid character of the early collections: by dissociating religion, art and science, important aspects of touching experience were compromised, and ultimately tactility was banned.

⁵ Ken Uprichard, a senior conservator from British Museum formulates the problem of asymmetry saying "If we just had to preserve the collections, we'd put them in a room, we'd lock them in a controlled environment and throw away the key, but we don't do that, we put them on display." (quoted in Candlin 2004, 75)

draw attention to this and to notice that our present museum tactics try to smuggle fragments of presence into the exhibited past held for the future, and vice versa: in the midst of an orgiastic present time it takes precautionary measures for the future.

Candlin also points out a blind spot in the preservation-access aporia: the conservation principle can be interpreted as a return of the repressed anxiety of status. According to her view, the asymmetry of the authorized sensory modalities in museums, in which professionals are allowed to touch the items while the visitors, even the visually impaired are banned to do so, is actually a symptom of the unsteady social status of the museological expertise, and of the anxiety about the possibly serious nature of lay experiences. From this, it can be deduced that in the context of museums, the theoretical debate around touch has never really been an innocent speculation, but it was a façade of power conflict. As a matter of fact, the questions concerning the identity and the status of the one who is allowed to touch, and the process of the authorization to do so, seem to be much more important.⁶ As Candlin warns, conservation of items masks the conservation of territory. It is mirrored also in the views of the 19th century art connoisseur, Gustav Waagen, who thinks it would be better, for the sake of the optimal preservation, if visitors with inadequate physical status, especially when they arrive en masse were excluded from the National Gallery, arguing that “the exhalation produced by the congregation of large numbers of persons, falling like vapour upon the pictures, tend to injure them.” (Ibid., 76)

This alarming desideratum by Waagen in fact is still not totally alien to everyday practice: while the presence of persons acting according to the protocols is confirmative for the institution, the uninitiated, uneducated, dirty-handed or disabled visitors are considered to be undesirable. Moreover, the latter also carry an addition-

al threat: their unclean hands, incapable to limit the desire of touch, contaminate not only the immaculate cultural heritage, but symbolically the collectors and the guardians as well. Therefore their actions, which insult the job of the museum professional, recall the old horrors of sacrilege and treason. (Classen 2007, 908)

Candlin neutralizes this widespread concern when she recognizes: the notion of “museum conservation” refers not only to the professional preservation of the items, but also to safeguard this professional preservation practice, including all the related power relations and social statuses. The same duality returns at the visitor site as well: the promotion of cultural heritage is never just a technical matter, whom the museum has to take care of. It is also the responsibility of the individual cultural player as well, which prevails in the forms of personal, mental and embodied knowledge and individual transfer, and cannot be subjected to the hierarchy of predetermined statuses.

The modern churches of art and sciences, and the priesthood of professionals working within form the paradigm of a vicarious culture. Even Heidegger raised his word against this, when he emphasized that “the manner of the proper preservation of the work is created and prefigured for us only and exclusively by the work itself,” and “as knowing, preservation of the work is the sober standing-within the awesomeness of the truth that happens in the work.” (2002, 41-42) The visitor is therefore the preserver who becomes an heir to culture. And in the latter’s capacity, his or her physical and mental presence is not only up to his or her personal arbitrariness and leisure, but also to a felt cultural commitment. The only question left is how can a human being, whose ordinary and least conscious experience is provided by the modalities of embodied cognition, become an heir to a culture when sight and mental understanding are the sole legitimate instruments for undertaking this responsibility.

Candlin’s analysis convincingly clarifies: the controversial principles of preservation and access do not in fact create an insoluble conflict: in the day-to-day prac-

⁶ “The status of who does the touching and knowing is crucial rather than the use of touch per se and that resistance to touch is as closely connected to the conservation of territory as it is to the preservation of objects.” (Ibid., 72)

tice, even the modern museum praxis provides space for the otherwise prohibited tact.⁷ The actual tension is more social in nature: who, when, on what and why can touch or not touch? And how would the museum expertise and the expert status be redefined if the possibility of tactile cognition – even in a limited way – would be extended to laymen as well?

5. Tactility in theory and practice

To the questions above, Candlin does not respond satisfactorily, but offers plenty of guidance, which can be complemented by further considerations in cases of ethnographic, scientific or design collections. If we seek to gain results that can be studied for practical purposes in terms of showcasing, it is important to clarify the needs and positions that we can recognize as legitimate:

(1) Above all, we accept the diagnosis of Gumbrecht, according to which in our present cultural situation, which is abundant in meaning effects, “presence effects have so completely vanished that they now come back in the form of an intense desire for presence.” (2004, 20) In the museum space, this means that visitors also want to get in touch besides gaining intellectual knowledge. They want to get in touch with the object and with materiality through the object, and also with former creators and users. (Candlin 2008, 285) In historical collections, visitors want to touch the past in some ways – and even their eyes are offended if they find out, they only see replicas. (Classen and Howes 2006, 217)

(2) In museums where there are collections from objects of everyday life (of folk, craft or industrial items), the access by sight can only provide a low degree of cognition, because “the exhibits cannot by action demonstrate their fitness for use” —as the typographer Edward Johnson writes about the 1933 exhibit of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society (cited in Mitchell 2012, 9). Usability is, of course, not seen as a value in itself, it is

valued in relation to the life context in which and for which it has been produced.

(3) Objects created for use, and immersed in the habitual – from remains of tribal life to relics of space exploration – refer to forms of life that partially overlap with the visitor’s life, and are partially different as well. The problem is that regarding “his own family goods and chattels all five senses confer in daily judgement, [while in the museum] he must be content with Sight alone.” (Ibid.) This reduction in sensorial modalities makes it impossible to experience the otherness according to its scale, which would be the core pedagogical aim of the museum. Classen and Howes give voice to the requirement that the objects with meaningful cultural distance should be experienced in their original sensory dimensions, instead of subjecting them to our scopic regime. (Classen and Howes 2006, 212) In order that these objects could offer a productive critique on our cultural presence and to perceive their meanings and contexts as vividly as possible, we need to reconstruct the sensorial modalities that are encoded in them as much as we can.

(4) The exploration of perceptual models that characterize each cultural paradigm must be carried out by the historical and comparative anthropology of the senses.⁸ This task is unavoidable also in terms of material culture studies. Not only social meanings are encoded in objects but a perception model as well. The object is not simply something to be read or decoded as a sign, but it must be physically perceived beforehand. In addition to the social or cultural biography of the object, we also need to discover its perception history, and we should look for ways to convey it in the exhibition practice.

(5) The museum has sprung from the culture of travelling and collecting. That’s why it is not surprising that in the 20th century the emerging tourism industry provided not only increased number of visitors, but also posed a challenge for the museum. The presence effects, whose lack is felt by the audience in necropolis-like

⁷ Although “the curator’s touch is perceived to be qualitatively different from that of the casual visitor” – writes Candlin. (2004, 77)

⁸ A pioneering work is Mark M. Smith’s *Sensing the Past* (2008).

museums (especially in collections of foreign folk culture, material culture or industrial design), are obtainable for the public in the field of tourism, even if not in the same form. Shelley Ruth Butler rightly points out that the museum should not be blocked from this competition, but must rejuvenate certain effects, learn from tourism, if its intention is to remain relevant in 21st century culture. (2003)

(6) The museum has been a place of learning from the beginning, and will remain for the time being. Classical interpretation theories have always tried to strike a balance between the text under investigation and the scope of its related contexts. In this way, the museum practice that operates with the cultural models of perception should decide from case to case how much it aims to direct the attention towards the immediate materials of the collection or to its contexts. When a greater emphasis is placed upon the former, the attitude of pure aesthetic reception is favored; in this case artworks are most likely to be exhibited, and the prohibition of touch is plain, understandable and well founded. In other cases, when the display focuses on the contextual scope or the practical use of the collection items (which is not surprising in ethnographic, technical or design exhibitions), it is much more difficult to maintain the principle of distancing that takes vision in a privileged position.

(7) The theoretical rehabilitation of touch does not, of course, solve all the practical problems that arise. The recognition of intersensory interaction between the tactile and the ocular, however, still provides practicable methods. Even a handful of authentic objects give the visitor some experience, which can be re-activated again when encountering objects available only for sight. Cooperation between sensory modalities does not stop when a partial limitation of the full sensorium occurs.

(8) Whether it is mere attraction, or the consequence of a disability policy, or the result of well-founded epistemological considerations, tactile tactics utilized in exhibitions should not replace a recognized imbalance with another one. As Gumbrecht has pointed

out, cultures, above all, need the co-operation of meaning effects and presence effects, and not the domination of one aspect. It is more about fluctuation and fragile balance rather than status quo carved in stone. Tactile tactics can bring back to museums the effects of the homely, the habitual and the life-like. At the same time, conceptual knowledge, through vision and discourse, can give a deeper perspective to these effects. By linking these approaches, tactility can find its way towards thinking, while vision can become sensually more refined.

For the museum, to ignore the scope of the full human sensorium and to entrust sight and a scientific jargon to animate dead exhibition objects is a tactical error. Nothing is able to animate the object and the human-environment relation better than human touch, the lived intercorporeality. On the other hand, Candlin notes how ironic it is when museums founded on the principle of the rationalistic and panoptic presentation, start experimenting with multi-sensorial techniques attracting irrational emotions, wanton phantasies, subjective empathy, or even mystical behavior to reach a larger number of paying audiences. Irrational moments are then attempted to transfigure into signposts of rationality. But when this happens, does it not question its original reason for existence? (Candlin 2008, 290-292) I do not intend to give the obvious answer too quickly, firstly because the consequences cannot be seen. However, I am ready to admit with Candlin, that instead of our belief in the boundlessness and the infallibility of our knowledge, the materialization and display of which would be the modern museum, it would be worthwhile to give room for the uncertain, the unclear, the imaginative, the tentative, and even the non-rational. In doing so, no dramatic novelty would happen, only an uncovering and recognition of something that has always been present in the visitor's practice. Since the audience has always been busy with a commute between the offered rationality and the desires, aspirations, imaginative impulses it brought. And even if license was officially

denied, the audience seized every opportunity to steal a little presence effect by touch.

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Looking back on the exhibition of the Finnish knotted carpets displayed in the 2013 Budapest Design Week and the “sensory trail” installed in it by the art students, it seems to me that the analysis of the visitors’ attitudes and the perspectives gained from the anthropology of perception proved to be undoubtedly decisive. Most of the exhibited objects at the time of their completion were created to address not only the eye. Their social meanings and the use of these carpets were determined not only by their appearance, but other sensorial aspects as well. Consequently, the question of sensory modalities is not a neutral one, but it as an inherent part of the meaning, which the museum wants to convey in the most authentic form. Although in the debate, at the time, it seemed that the museum professionals and the designer collaborators were going in opposite directions, the situation was exactly reversed: coming from different backgrounds, they tried to face the same challenge.

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