“TOUCH” is an international art project that explores tactility in relation to knowledge, creativity, cultural practices and innovation in art.

The project is supported by the European Cultural Foundation.

The TOUCH Project involves the FabriC Association, the International Council for Cultural Centers (I3C) and the Bread Houses Network, ESDI (Spain) and Cultura 21 Nordic (Denmark).
TOUCH Project Summary

Current dominant cultural values and aesthetic patterns are closely linked to the visual perception of reality.

“Our working hypothesis considers that the sense of touch of visually impaired people may be a creative and experimental lab for further exploration and re-evaluation of what constitutes visual art.”

The project enables sighted and visually impaired professional artists, art students and art lovers to make and experience contemporary art together. It also strives to draw attention of policy makers to rethink disability presentation in culture field.

Artists from 3 European countries - Bulgaria, Spain and Denmark have been working with different volunteers to develop contemporary art works and through interactive online platform have been exchanging experience generated in the process. Some artists have been experimenting with the combination of visual art, music & sound art and design. Researchers examined the perception of the process in its physiological, psychological, cultural, and social dimensions. Through networks the methodology of collaborative work between sighted and sight-impaired people have been spread across cultural and educational institutions in Europe and abroad.

Main project team:

Atanas Totlyakov - Author of the concept, Bulgarian visual artist;
Nadezhda Savova - Bulgarian researcher, PhD Candidate, Cultural Anthropology, Princeton University, USA; Founder and President of I3C and the Bread Houses Network
Carlos Jimenez  Spanish professor and researcher at ESDi,. Director of the Department for Product and Interior Design. Touch project coordinator and curatorship for Spain;
Oleg Koefoed - Action-philosopher, PhD, researcher, interventionist, Denmark;
Mariana Prodanova  project manager, Bulgaria

Project activities

Project activities have been launched on the basis of in-depth needs assessment and are grouped in the following segments:
- Art works and activities based on tactility as means of expression;
- Observation and documentation of the tactile perceptions of people creating tactile images;
- Involvement and inclusion of diverse audience - sight-impaired people, visual artists, art students, art professors, sighted people;

Project main goal

The TOUCH team wants to explore what potential tactile perception might hold to enrich visual art, to change the way society perceives and understands visual disability in relation to art and to stimulate further experimentation and practice in these important fields.

Short term objectives

Changing basic attitude of visual disability and raise awareness about the important contribution it can bring to the visual arts and for the arts to be ever more sensitive to people with impaired sight;
Encourage participation and interaction of visually impaired people in the environment of the visual arts;
Drawing attention of cultural, educational, policy-making institutions and media to the need for improvement of accessibility of cultural sites, services and art in general for visually impaired people;
Helping visually impaired artists to gain new knowledge and skills;
Opening possibilities to discuss and debate about art and visual disability-related issues.
Partner organization: The FabriC Association
Since 2006 the FabriC Association offers a wide range of services to cultural organizations and artists in the region of North Central Bulgaria with the aim to dynamize and diversify the cultural scene in the region with a long term perspective. Its mission is to support and encourage cultural actors to adopt innovative approaches in their work and further development addressing new challenges. (More information: www.fabrikata.eu)

Partner Organization: ESDi, Sabadell Higher School of Design
Since 1989, ESDi’s mission is to transmit knowledge about art and design. ESDi's educational and research activities are organized by university departments that encompass teaching, research, and knowledge transfer and dissemination. As an Affiliated Centre of Ramon Llull University (URL), ESDi began offering an Official Undergraduate University Degree in Design in the 2008/09 academic year. This degree meets the guidelines established by the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Students pursuing ESDi's Official Undergraduate University Degree in Design may choose from the following specializations: Graphic, Fashion, Product, Interior, Audiovisual and Integrated Multidisciplinary. It also offers a wide range of master's programs, such as the Official Master's Degree in New Media Art Curatorship. (More information: www.esdi.es)

Partner Organization: International Council for Cultural Centers and Bread Houses Network
The International Council for Cultural Centers (I3C) is the global network of national networks/associations of community cultural centers, usually supported by public programs, currently connecting more than 50 countries on 6 continents. I3C links these thousands of local arts houses and their cultural managers and coordinators at the Ministries of Culture by being currently the only non-governmental organization representing internationally local community cultural centers with their rights, responsibilities, and needs for favorable conditions for universal access to artistic co-creation at the community level in order to re-shape the experience of passive assistance to performances and unlock people’s creativity and improve their quality of life. The Bread Houses Network has been evolving since 2009 within I3C as a network of innovative community culinary-cultural centers, where the main artistic activity is regular collective bread-making that brings together people of all ages and cultures to make, bake, and break bread together: this universally loved creative practice is perhaps the most universally recognized metaphor, and in this case method, of peace-building. Nadezhda Savova set up the first pilot Bread House at her great-grandmother's house in Gabrovo, Bulgaria, and from there the model spread to currently 12 countries on 5 continents.

Partner Organization: Cultura 21 Nordic
Cultura 21 Nordic is part of the International network of Cultura21 aimed at bringing together organizations and individuals across the globe striving to advance social, economic and ecological justice. The network deals with environmental concerns out of both an artistic and scientific perspective. As such it brings the question of culture to bear upon the most widely used, at the same often least understood or even misunderstood term, namely that of ‘sustainable development’.
Cross-sensory learning in the aesthetics of tactilism

By Nadezhda Savova
Anthropology Department, Princeton University

Have you ever wondered what is the most pleasant texture to touch? Such question certainly cannot have one answer alone due to the wide variety of cultures and different access to and habits of experiencing diverse surfaces and objects depending on the environments we inhabit and the senses we involve in this habitation. Yet in my travels and anthropological research in 75 countries, I have discovered that the anthropologist's position is among the most wide-spread and sacred symbols, is also one of the most universally pleasant tactile experiences in its unique smoothness and warmth as well as interactive in the way it stimulates the desire and ability of people to mould the texture, turning the experience of touch from tacitile (matter touched) into haptic (matter held).

This at first sight simple discovery evolved into an innovative methodology of community-building, tested at the first Bread House cultural-cultural center that I established with volunteers at my grandmother's house in Bulgaria as a place where experimentants as I call collective bread-making events as regular cross-sensory-experiences bridging the gaps between blind and sighted people, generations, ethnic groups, and people with physical and mental disabilities. The method's ultimate simplicity was the key to its popularity and success nationwide, and the method spread to other organizations in Bulgaria and, through my travels for conferences and projects representing the International Cultural Centers, the Bread House model, both a metaphor and method, spread to 12 countries on 5 continents. It was precisely the deeply tactile experience of working with bread that became the occasion from which the TOUCH project started to coagulate and rise.

TOUCH as an international cooperation between artists and cultural scholars in Bulgaria, Denmark, and Spain evolved out of a workshop led by Bulgarian artist Atanas Totoyakov and myself, Nadezhda Savova, founder of the Bread House Cultural-Cultural Center, www.bread-art-house.org, in Gabrovo, Bulgaria, and the Bread Houses Network, www.breadhousesnetwork.org, part of the larger International Council for Cultural Centers, www.international3c.org. The workshop took place in August 2010 in Gabrovo, Bulgaria, and involved cultural managers, scholars, and artists from 20 countries and 5 continents who participated blind-folded in a series of co-creative experiences from collective bread-making to clay sculpting and drawing based on touching wooden objects made of traditional Bulgarian gitian strings. The workshop was part of the First Summer School on Arts and Sciences for Sustainability in Social Transformation (ASSIST), www.assist2010.ning.com, co-organized as a partnership between the International Council for Cultural Centers and Cultura 21, www.cultura21.org, with main coordinator Oleg Kroeford, and with the local cooperation of the Fabrikata Association, www.fabrikata.bg, led by Mariana Nikolaeva, main coordinator of the TOUCH Project funded by the European Cultural Foundation. One of the participants in ASSIST, design professor Carlos Jimenez from the ESDI University in Sabadell, Spain, became the third TOUCH partner along with his team of design professors colleagues from ESDI. Thus, the TOUCH Project involves Cultura 21 Nordic (Denmark), I3C and the Bread Houses Network and Fabrikata (Bulgaria), and ESDI (Spain).

The TOUCH Project as a concept is based on the artistic work of Bulgarian artist Atanas Totoyakov, who has been experimenting since 1999 with tactile art in what he calls non-vertical visual art based on the perception of touch and art created by sight-impaired people together with sighted, blind-folded people. The artistic canon of Western culture has for centuries been based on the visual and textual paradigm of perception and truth, which defines why the artistic aesthetic canon of the last centuries has说话 to the largely blind people slowly over the last decades have revived to the previous perception and engagement, through installation and performance arts integrated with mixed-media visual arts experimenting to engage the other senses through various textures, sound, and movement, and slowly but lastly explored including the experience of food and taste.

The TOUCH Project developed a series of experiments in co-creation to start laying the foundational stones of a whole new aesthetic canon in visual arts that can embrace the tactile experience of art pieces, or what we term the aesthetics of tactilism, building on the works of artists and philosophers Marinetti and Epstein in the first half of the 20th century. The working hypothesis of the TOUCH project considers that the sense of touch of visually impaired people may be a creative and experimental site for exploration and re-evaluation of what constitutes visual art and a departure point for understanding bodily and thus through deep, embodied empathy the experience of the blind which could help us develop programs that integrate sight-impaired people both as creators and audience for artistic work.

The question of empathy or “feeling into” rather than “feeling for” (often misunderstood as pity sentido from a position of distance and superiority) as explorations of embodiment into the experiences of the sight-impaired is the vantage point from which I reflect on the issues of tactility in art through my anthropologically-framed participant observation role as the main analyst of the project, whose processes and effects (and affects) I registered through interviews and participant observation with a total of about a hundred people from the three countries part of the project. Empathy in the process evolved as the experience of co-habitation of the creative ideas as well as daily experiences of people in diverse positions of sensorial perceptions of the world as they were all engaging in what I would call cross-sensory learning, where touch and vision were not seen as binary sensory worlds, but rather tactility became the complementary element to visually pleasing art pieces, as in the works of Atanas Totoyakov and his students, and at the same time tactility opened new possibilities for engaging all the other senses into the experience of visual art and design.

TOUCH as an international project involving visually-impaired artists, art students and art lovers from three European countries - Bulgaria, Denmark, and Spain - to make and experience contemporary art together by placing themselves in the position of blind people through blind-folding and freely experimenting with unconventional combinations of media, from visual art-works on anything from plastic to scratched CD surfaces, to music & sound art, design, bread, clay, soap, wood, and textiles, as well as a variety of bodily movements without the participation of sight through spaces ranging from densely populated urban streets to forests and the insides of a house and a labyrinth gallery.

The project's longer-term educational and socially-transformatove param is to promote at the national, regional, and EU policy levels models for innovation in the arts for visually impaired people. The vision of the work is that countries is still traditionally thought as a visual activity, even when framed as participatory and engaging learning experience through the “visual thinking strategies” (VTS) employed in museum education. The Bulgarian context in particular is a fairly conservative art field, where tactile art is unknown to the general public. Museums and art galleries have sporadic exhibitions, mostly with ceramic objects presented as tactile art, and only few make use of tactile diagrams and touch tours, but these are not spaces that offer possibilities for co-creation of art and the engagement of both sighted and sight-impaired people.
The TOUCH Project's various workshops involved sighted and sight-impaired people seeking to develop together an aesthetics of tactilism through two main approaches. The first approach involved the innovative and alternative treatment of objects and textures such as: de- and re-contextualized daily objects (Carlos Jimenez, Tito Favaro); thermochromic textiles (Marina Castan); foods, in this tradition much needed "public sphere" where people from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, ages, both gender, and with diverse abilities (rather than "disabilities") could meet and interact in both playful and serious fashion, learning from each other in the process of awakening and exploring their sensorial world. The public sphere, in this sense, was created from a shift in the focus from the "five senses" to the sensorial experience this they propel, but connected by the concept of the importance of what I would call "interactive regularity" through on-going and non-class-based interactions and opportunities for cross-sensorial learning.

In the body reactions and comments made by the participants in the TOUCH Project and the general public that to the exhibits could be noted that the cross-sensorial learning was opening a certain "ritual of passage", as defined in classical anthropology by Van Gennep's "rites of passage" and later in Victor Turner's "liminal space" of transition and transformation through collective rituals. Sighted people across the various cultural contexts in the TOUCH Project expressed amazement at the sensations of peace and tranquility that they derived from the feeling of losing notion of space, size, dimension, and time when sight was shut and the suddenly unknown world became both an object and a subject, both the thing one was experiencing and the experience itself enveloping the person with all of its rich sensoriality. It is precisely this sense of losing grip of the known time and space and entering a domain of the unknown and the potentially transformative or liminal space that defines the process of a "ritual of passage," where the participant is ultimately reunited with the known time and space and yet already enriched and transformed by the liminal experience that offered a different perspective, even if not one that could be enacted on a regular, daily basis. The importance of imagining and experiencing even for a time seminal. The sense of humor as a add the other, such as a life lived without vision, is a transformative experience in itself as it opens up the possibility for questioning and imagination as the primary next steps needed for any transformation.
Psychologists have researched various tactile and sensorial experiences to find correlations between cognitive and sensorial perceptions, and tactile art could be a site of rich data for further investigation on the ways in which the brain and its cognitive capabilities change and develop as people engage more of their senses in various combinations and with varied intensities. An interesting point is that psychologists have found that to answer the question why people like eating with their fingers and most non-Western cultures still preserve this cultural habit as a core of their traditional foodways one physiological and psychosomatic explanation is that the area in the brain registering taste is located in direct proximity to the area registering touch, and thus the tactile signals sent from the contact with our fingertips when tasting food provide for a rich cross-sensorial experience that enhances the perception of taste. What more intriguing cross-sensorial experiences could evolve out of mixing the tactile experiences with the other senses? These are the questions raised by Nikola's tactile labyrinth in Denmark and Atanas mobile dark gallery in Bulgaria, to which the workshops started offering some fascinating insights.

Sighted people were further surprised to discover the complex ways in which sight-impaired people gather multiple kinds of information from the surrounding world through all of their senses engaged at once. Thus, here a key issue for the aesthetics of tactilism is the challenge of cultural translation of concepts and experiences. Indeed, in order to create a new aesthetic system of terms defining the tactile in the non-visual visual arts, one needs to first comprehend the difficulty of translating from one cultural context to the other or from the language of one social sphere to the other in this case, from the tactile to the visual, as much as it would be complex to translate economic indicators into artistic terms - the main difficulty being how to communicate visually-informed terms used by the sighted people and non-visualy-informed, or synthetically sensorial, terms used by the sight-impaired people into the language of a new aesthetics of tactilism.

The findings from TOUCH can be brought back to the visual culture and design in multiple ways in order to respond often in unexpected, humorous, and creative ways to diverse human needs in the fields of ergonomics, accessibility to movement through spaces, experience of art works, and entertainment, etc. The exploratory creative journey that the TOUCH Project initiated now invites artists, cultural managers, and cultural policy makers to also embark on this exciting research and examine ways in which the cross-sensorial learning method could be applied in a variety of social, cultural, and educational settings, from arts schools and museums, galleries, and community cultural centers to other social spaces such as hospitals and centers for people with physical and psychological special abilities, elderly people's homes and orphanages, connecting and cross-pollinating the social spheres in the same way we are invited to connect our senses. Based on the findings of the TOUCH project and the years of research for my dissertation on the social role and impact of community cultural centers, what emerged as a key issue at the concluding stages of the project is how to secure the sustainability in the application of these findings and methods of work. To this, I suggest focusing on the power of community cultural centers and arts spaces to become hubs for regular inter-generational and inter-cultural gatherings where people could be stimulated to engage in cross-sensorial learning, for which a crucial factor is the regularity of engagement with the tactile and the other senses, or what I would call sensorial accumulation: in this sense, it is crucial to provide spaces offering universal access to people of all backgrounds to be able to engage their senses and tap into their creative potential on a regular basis.

In addition to further studying the application of tactile art in various social and educational settings, what would be intriguing to explore in the future is the development of tactile art in diverse cultural contexts around the world, as some cultures have very distinct sensorial schemata in terms of the importance that certain textures and tastes hold for the culture and that its people are more apt at enjoying and enriching. Could tactile art then be an innovative bridge towards inter-cultural dialogue, where the process is rather inter-cultural doing, as already observed in the processes of collective bread-making by people from various cultural backgrounds? Could the describing of the world through translation of cross-cultural and cross-sensorial experiences be a new way towards peace-building? If we say “we are touched” when something moves our heart, then it makes sense to explore our senses to their fullest beauty, mystery, and potential to hold hidden answers to some of our modern quests for co-existence.
TOUCH AS MEANS FOR ARTISTIC IMPACT
Empirical research on tactile art

By Atanas Totlyakov
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Introduction

In 1921, Filippo Tomaso Marinetti published the Tactilism Manifesto, in which he proclaimed his ideas about art inspired by touch. In his vision that was an art overcoming the rigid paradigms of the optical, audible, and verbal and focusing on the tactile experience. Marinetti created the term “tactile art,” but it remained an art embryo with the potential to develop in the future.

In our daily lives we often forget about the tactile sense, we do not notice the texture of the clothes we wear, nor the unexpected touch by a stranger, etc. At the same time, every second, our brains receive a huge amount of tactile information. Tactile communication is of primary importance, and it is through touch that the baby explores the world.

How can we develop an aesthetic system based on these innate capabilities and dispositions?

Undoubtedly, the sense of touch is a key instrument in our lives. The simplest acts we take for granted, such as to hold a cup of glass and drink from it, depend on our ability to touch. Our sensory systems and perception are based on the strongest of all external stimuli, usually the visual one. How and on which of the five senses we base our perception depends on the power of the agitation, its biological importance, and our reason and will. For a virtuoso violin player are important not only his hearing skills, but also the developed agility of his fingers. The art of painting involves a similar process of touch. The artist works with his sight but also with the sense of touch while laying the oil paint on the canvas or working in other artistic media.

The role of touch is obvious in sculpture works. Tactile communication is of primary importance, and it is through touch that the baby explores the world.

Aesthetic systems developed based on the visual and the auditory dominate the modern cultural practice. Yet, they are only in the moment of unexpected touch, and for a few second the strongest stimulus will be touch. Yet this will not transform their attention is needed. This could be an accidental physical contact with another person, the entrance of any tactile art exhibit he imagined a sign “Do not look!”, or even more explicit, “VISUAL PERCEPTION PROHIBITED!”

In a normal daily situation, persons with normal sight would face big challenges to try to switch their mindset from visual to tactile perception. A rather “extreme” situation of activating one’s attention is needed. This could be an accidental physical contact between two passers-by. Both of them will register the tactile sense only in the moment of unexpected touch, and for a few second the strongest stimulus will be touch. Yet this will not transform their mindset and they will remain dominated by vision and hearing.

Perception of relief signs

In 1824, Louis Braille developed his own system of writing through a system of raised dots which can be read by touching them. The system is easy to use, and allows the expression of peculiarities of various languages. The Braille system is new and unique since it is not a continuation of already used paradigms. It was considered as the best one and was accepted in France in 1953, one year after his death. Today, it is commonly used and enables the publication of many books for sight-impaired people. These publications required the participation of experts from different fields to explore the problems and peculiarities of perception of relief signs. Relief maps, diagrams, and drawings, which reflect the perception of the sight-impaired persons of the surrounding world, are of special interest in the aesthetics of tactile art. Philip Newth, illustrator of children’s books for sight-impaired people, argues that the complete comprehension of tactile illustrations can only be done through personal communication, and a sighted intermediary is necessary.

Blind artist?

I believe that for the development of an art based on touch is important that the tactile works have the same powerful impact on both sight-impaired and sighted people. The phrase “blind painter” sounds absurd, and it is precisely these limits and stereotypes that we have to overcome through our work with tactile expressive means. It is difficult for us to accept the possibility for an artistic reality to exist beyond the commonly accepted values. If a painter looses his sight, this will be a serious personal tragedy. Yet, if a painter manages to reframe his imagination towards perception through touch and to express it through his works, this would be a personal victory. I took this path.
Visual & Non-visual

My first personal experience of entering the realm of touch with the means of visual arts includes a series of drawings created without direct visual contact. They comprise a few cycles, depending on the period of creation and artistic maturity of the idea. Their titles are *Eyes Closed* (2005-2007) and *Free Drawings* (2010-2011). Both series are a form of “training”, an experimental path for the transformation of my imagination. Their ultimate goal is the synthesis of visual and non-visual. In terms of my personal experience, these works are tactile, but for the audience they are visual.

**Eyes closed**

The object of art interpretation is the secondary image imprinted on the consciousness after closing the eyes. Under normal lighting, an unclear silhouette is imprinted on one’s mind. Gradually, this image is dissolved in an infinite play of spots of colors and shapes.

*The goal is not to try to copy the effect, but to find a vantage point for expression. The period of concentration in tactile experience is very short, from the moment of closing the eyes to the complete disappearance of the image. The drawings are created with traditional drawing materials such as pencil, coal, chalk, and paper. The composition depends on the emotional state of the artist and on how long he works on the drawing.*

The drawing space is defined by touching the margins of the paper sheet. The artist receives tactile information from both the smoothness of the sheet (by touching the sheet) and by holding the instrument for drawing which registers the friction with the material upon pressure.

**Free drawings**

The experience gained through the series “Eyes Closed” made clear that the main factor in an art work created without visual contact is the time dedicated to its creation. The “density” of the drawing is very different for pieces developed for 1 to 15 minutes. Other factors are speed and the pressure of the tool with which the drawing is made. Time can be pre-set (using timer) or the drawing tool can serve as a timer, for example the pen used for ink drawings, which holds a certain amount of ink until it is all absorbed by the paper. The speed at which the ink flows and is absorbed depends on tactile factors: touch, pressure, etc.

*Free Drawings* is a series of drawings with pen and ink created through automatic drawing without visual contact. The time for execution is the time of depletion of ink. Most of these drawings are executed through a pointillism technique as the leading elements are the clusters of miniature dots.
Tactile Labyrinth

Tactile Labyrinth is a series of graphic works and an installation of 90 objects created on hand-made paper with relief imprint. The main expressive means is low relief created through pressing and carving without the use of any additional visually stimulating pigments. The softness of touch and the possibility to perceive the composition through the fingertips define the conceptual frame of the project focused on the creation of tactile-rich abstract works. The works are composed of multiple lines and forms of varied relief.

The concept of this series of works is close to other non-figurative tactile works of art made for sight-impaired people, but the goal of the Tactile Labyrinth is to bring free and rich associations for both people with and without sight damage.

Polly Edman in her book Tactile graphics studies the interaction between figurative and non-figurative book illustrations for children, and she reaches the conclusion that abstract forms that have no connection to previously formed opinion based on known facts can provoke equally well the mind of a child both with and without sight impairment.

For me as an artist the world of perception is above all an abstract world born by the associations that the touched object provokes. The material for the works of art, cotton paper, stimulates pleasant tactile sensations when touched. An important principle in my work with tactile art objects is the possibility for the production of multiple copies of the same work. The tactile experience is strictly personal. A work of tactile art does not allow for simultaneous impact on a group of people. Each person has to experience it personally. While in visual arts, a painting affects all who are in visual contact with it. Unlike with vision and hearing, tactile experience is characterized by and dependent upon the elimination of distance. Touch offers direct contact with the object, yet, also a contact with only a fragment of the object as it is limited by the size of the individual’s palm (compared to the vast possibilities of sight). The reproduction of a piece of tactile art is the only way to open up a possibility for simultaneous impact upon a group of “perceivers” (rather than “spectators”).

Some objects and graphic works have been presented as individual exhibits at:
- Biennale of small format art, Pleven 2006 (Tactile Graphic 1, 2, and 3). The works received an award by the Pleven Municipality and are now property of the Ilia Beshkov Art Gallery
- XIV Graphic Biennale, Varna 2007 (“Tactile Labyrinth 1 and 2”);
- XV Graphic Biennale, Varna 2009 (“Cabin for Tactile Art”);
- National competition for young artists, critics, and curators, International Foundation “St. Cyril and Methodius” 2008 (Gallery for sight-impaired people). The works received a special award and are property of the Foundation;
- Graphic award nomination (Manifesto of Tactile Graphic 1, 2 n 3). The National Award of Allianz, Bulgaria 2008, for painting, sculpture, and graphic;
- Graphic award nomination (Tactile System 1, 2 n 3). The National Award of Allianz, Bulgaria 2011, for painting, sculpture, and graphic;
NEO-TACTILISM DIARY
18 March, 2011

Tactile Drawings

For the purpose of this performance in urban environment a new instrument for “tactile drawing” has been developed. It is a frame made of hard base and elastic covering layer (180mm/270mm/8 mm). A square (size 120mm/120mm/4mm) is cut into the elastic layer, and into this square slot the artist can place a semi-hard sheet (PVC material) that is prone to pressure and gets easily engraved. The frame has been used in other presentations of the project and for other creative work of the author.

The artist draws on the PVC sheet with metal instruments that engrave various forms on the surface as the person drawing is blindfolded, thus shutting down the main sense used in the arts vision where the person drawing develops shapes and figures in low relief that come much more out of his and her inner vision.

Each participant takes a “working” position. All necessary instruments are laid out on a table as well as the object of inspiration – an ocean shell. The shell is chosen for its tactile richness (high-relief exterior side and perfectly smooth interior). With eyes folded, the participant interprets the touch of the shell and expresses this sensorial experience in a drawing.
In Search of a Tactile Ideal

25 March, 2011

In Search of a Tactile Ideal is a performance carried out on the premises of the Veliko Turnovo University with participation of students and faculty members. The main artistic media were soaps, whose surface has been carved and changed. Soap has been chosen because of its daily use as an object that comes on many occasions in close contact with human skin. The goal is to focus the attention of the participants on the changing perception of a daily pragmatic object as the soap transforms from hard and smooth to soft and slippery upon the touch of water and human hands. Furthermore, its shape is transformed ergonomically under the action of the hands, which opens possibilities for rich tactile experience.

Participants work with soaps with previously carved surfaces and a bucket of warm water. Each participant is blind-folded and by touch selects soap and starts washing the soap through his or her sense of touch. This action is accompanied by a reading of the poem of the Russian poet Henrich Sapgir “Tactile opus.” Each participant interacts with the soap for the period of one reading of the poem, and the soap is then passed on to the next pair of hands.
CD Tactile
12 April, 2011

We all touch CDs and DVDs with extreme caution to protect their surface from mechanical damage and prevent from losing any data saved on them.

I find new qualities in these objects and their surfaces, which challenge and ignore this common practice. The ideally smooth surface of the CDs offers a platform for the creation of other kinds of information: information meant to be "read" with our fingertips.

The installation includes 111 hand-engraved CD x DVD and standard plastic CD/DVD boxes. They have covers with digital print and Braille relief print on the inside of the box.

They can be arranged in various ways, and are permanent, durable, fit easily into human hand, and are widely spread and have a familiar sense of touch. They can be experienced individually or in a group, and are easy to transport and used in various art and non-art events. They can be "read" in both a lit up or dark space. The tactile cover allows people with limited sight to understand the concept without a facilitator, while sighted people can focus on an internal, introvert experience of these unconventionally presented conventional objects.
Tactile Interactivity
19 April, 2011

This installation includes a video (4 minutes and 10 seconds) and an object, a box (35 cm/35 cm/35 cm) covered with black cloth with two openings at the opposite sides. The show is accompanied by a tactile “participation” as each spectator is invited to model a piece of clay placed inside the box. The interactivity of the installation comes from the on-going transformation of the object, while the sculptor does not possess any visual contact with the object.

The video presents an analogous situation. Participants place their hands inside the box through a red curtained opening and each successive participant explores the way the predecessor has shaped the clay piece inside only relying on their sense of touch. Thus, the hands of the participants and their actions are the main visual element of the video. The parallel actions aim to create a situation in which the digital image and the real touch focus the attention of the spectator on the sensorial perception of touch and the registered tactile, not visual, information.
INFRARED DOCUMENTATION

Artistic Action with students from the Fine Arts Department, Turnovo University

When we talk about tactile sense, we can definitely assert that the strongest sensorial stimulating situation is when we enter a completely dark environment. In this case, the main source of information, which usually comes through vision, is suspended, and all other senses become much more acute, which transforms our overall disposition to the world.

The tactile experience, however, is always personal and concrete. It cannot be documented in “clean,” “raw” form, and only its external expressions could be “recorded” and saved. Verbal narration is often insufficient for detailed description. A video record could document the subtlety of reactions but it requires light which would destroy the experience.

This is the issue addressed by the Infrared Documentation experiment - to create a visual image of a touch-art creation. This is done through a photo camera which works in the infrared spectrum. The selected topic is our daily clothes. These clothes are in on-going contact with our skin and this makes them an important symbol of tactile art. Five black T-shirts are arranged hanging in a row in a dark corridor, and the textile is stretched to its limits on a wooden wall. The participants have to decorate the shirts with textile paint. They use tubes of paints which touch and strength are required to squeeze the paste out of its container. This is an additional tactile element in the performance, as the amount of paint depends on the strength applied on the tube. The black color of the paint, the textile, and the surrounding environment do not allow the participants to exert visual control. The only way for knowledge and control is through touch.
Tactile Interpretation of Land Signs

The installation provides a synthesis of visual and tactile striving to achieve a holistic perception. The inspiration comes from the marks left by car tires in snow or on the tarmac surface as an element that repeats in successive overlaps. This land sign is extremely widespread and recognizable across the world. Photo slides and graphically modeled images of tire imprints in snow are used and their lines are manually engraved in low relief onto large vinyl plates producing a variety of textures to be explored manually.

The central art piece involves hand-engraved PVC (plastic) parts. A person is lying on his belly on a soft mat and touching the plastic pieces with engraved relief that surround the mat. In this body position, the body is drawn to tactile experiences of its surrounding already experiencing a direct contact with the ground. Also, the range of sight is very limited and the person cannot perceive the whole art piece. The position of the head naturally leads to the desire to close one’s eyes and rest and this is how consciousness is naturally transformed through our bodily position into a propensity to experience the world through tactile perception more than sight.

Installation elements

Two digital prints on vynil (120/180 cm)

Working with slides with the image of the tire marks on snow and how they change in time should result in a graphic image with characteristics of a visual sign and rich semiotic content. The attention of the participants is focused on the transformation of a visual into a tactile object.

Series of 20 pieces made of hand-made paper with relief imprint (170/120/4 mm each)

The same graphic image is used, this time transformed by relief imprint. Paper as a material is soft and pleasant to touch. The replication of the image offers the participants a direct contact with the objects, since tactile art requires one-to-one interaction with the art work.

An installation of horizontally engraved PVC (plastic) plates and a soft mat (camping mat should do) placed on the floor or ground

The participant is involved into a radically new situation in the context of art perception transforming him from spectator (visual reception) into perceiver (tactile reception). He lies on the soft mat on the ground, and from this relaxed, comfortable position of the body, the perceiver’s hands, and mind are free to focus fully on the experience of touching the vinyl plates surrounding the body on all sides. In the perceiver’s mind, signals are registered from both the palms and the finger tips and at the same time from the whole body (the frontal part and the hips and thighs) as it is in direct contact with the ground. Since the perceiver has already remembered visually the sign from looking at it from above before lying down, he is letting the sense of touch replace the sense of vision and enrich it, thus making possible the synthesis of visual and tactile perceptions.

A version of the Tactile Interpretation of a land sign was presented in the urbanized context of Byala during the international meeting part of the TOUCH Project and during the International Arts Symposium. The chosen site of the installation combined a variety of tactile elements: open space with a pool opening the senses to the experience of breeze, sun light, water drops, and coolness which enriched the skin receptors. This experience showed that tactile art pieces could be shown and experienced well in any public space and in the context of large groups, which adds to its social component and aim to involve new audiences and foster the interaction of various groups of people in various spaces.
HAND made book with Relief - Tactile Graphic works

The presented three-dimensional work is a series of 20 graphic pieces of paper with embossing (210 mm / 148 mm each) assembled in a general body. Dimensions of the body are - 430 mm / 148 mm. The means of expression is low relief engraved without the intervention of additional means such as color inks and pigments. The artistic approach is directed towards tactile "saturated" abstract works. The tactile graphics are accompanied by texts in Braille alphabet.

Text in the book in Braille:
Senses! How little we make sense of all around.
Senses, to sense three-dimensional space and one-directional time.
Sense so limited, senses so human.
The happy sighted ones seek to behold the particles of light.
The happy hearing ones seek to catch the whisper of wind.
We hurt, we feel pain.
We fall, our body TOUCHes the earth ...
Pressure! Contact!
We do not hear. We do not see ...
We TOUCH.

3. Ìèõàèë Ýïøòåéí. Íîâîå ñåêòàíñòâî. Òèïû ðåëèãèîçíî  ôèëîñîôñêèõ óìîíàñòðîåíèé â Ðîññèè (70-å 80-å ãã. XX â.). Ì., Ëàáèðèíò, 1994
Partner Organization: ESDi, Sabadell Higher School of Design

Since 1989, ESDi’s mission is to transmit knowledge about art and design. ESDi’s educational and research activities are organized by university departments that encompass teaching, research, and knowledge transfer and dissemination. As an Affiliated Centre of Ramon Llull Universit (URL), ESDi began offering an Official Undergraduate University Degree in Design in the 2008/09 academic year. This degree meets the guidelines established by the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Students pursuing ESDi’s Official Undergraduate University Degree in Design may choose from the following specializations: Graphic, Fashion, Product, Interior, Audiovisual and Integrated Multidisciplinary. It also offers a wide range of master’s programs, such as the Official Master’s Degree in New Media Art Curatorship. (More information: www.esdi.es)

Carlos Jimenez. Touch project coordinator and curatorship for Spain

Full professor and researcher at ESDi, director of the Department for Product and Interior Design. Simultaneously, holding a PhD at University of La Laguna. My research interests embrace Art and Design potential to catalyze local and inclusive communitarian development processes. I’ve coordinated and promoted international projects such as “Guia Summer Campus for the Arts” and “PROCEDER: Canary Program in Ecodesign for Sustainable Local Development”. Graduated in Fine Arts at University of the Basque Country with a stage at Norwich School of Art & Design-, and Master in Ecodesign at Elisava Design School, I am experienced professionally in socio-environmental communications, promotion of cultural heritage, exhibition design and museography.

ESDi contribution to the project

Some previous considerations and working hypothesis have been taken into account for ESDi’s research. The natural and cultural environment we live in is mainly built up on the sense of sight, on a visual perception of reality. Current dominant cultural values and aesthetic patterns are closely linked to that sense. Our working hypothesis considers that temporary annulment of the sense of sight may be considered as a prejudicial situation in order to manage a richer perception of reality. Our involvement in ESDi’s research and creative venture was a very challenging way to delve into some of the following key challenges:

To let other senses (including the sense of humour) be strengthened in order to manage a richer perception of sensitive reality. 

To analyse how our assumed and classical aesthetic paradigm would be modified.

To test how the findings could be brought back to the visual culture and design, to fulfill unmet human needs (ergonomics, sensory, accessibility, non-discrimination, design for all).

From ESDi, a wide range of activities were proposed, such as theoretical discussions, creative workshops, open conferences and fieldtrips, most of them organized in collaboration with the Spanish Institute for the Blind (ONCE). More than 200 people were eagerly involved as a community of practice, including students, professors, researchers, designers, artists and professionals from different fields either blind or not. The following pages collect just a brief summary of all the reflections emerged from this intense experimentation and buzz process carried out along the last 12 months. All of them are included in the final exhibition that took place at ESDi, from the 14th of November until the end of December of 2011. Part of this exhibition was itinerant and will be showed in different locations and countries.

Several lessons were learnt by us along this research and creative venture. For instance, we can’t talk about touch as the substitution of sight for visually impaired people, but to talk about “multi-sensory stimulation” for everyone because we have our senses asleep. Although visual dominance implies, with no doubt, instantaneous decoding and communicating mechanisms, we are also more exposed to “semiotic eutrophication” than ever before, becoming a sort of shortsighted (losing the ability to look, to observe, to perceive in a more profound way). Thus, we need to be educated in the way that different senses work interconnected for a richer perception of reality (1+1 is more than 2 here), but also towards a more significant capacity to express ourselves. Moreover, we discover that we are able to dig deeper, beyond the assumed functionalities given by the objects. People with some disability, especially visually impaired, do this daily. In some way, they are forced to adapt their “given” or “closed-designed environments” in order to serve their special needs. Unconsciously or not, and probably with not too much aesthetic intention in this process, they are already creating poetry, and pushing the boundaries and prejudices a step forward.

In the following pages, we include some seeds from the main contributors and experiences lived. Just a brief summary of proposals, that lead us to conclude that, this is not however, an ending project. Our involvement in “The Touch Project” is the beginning of new emerging and promising approaches for our daily work within design culture. Either educational principles, research priorities and professional practice need to be reconsidered for a better contribution to society. Our updated illusion remains available at the blog: http://nonvisualarts.blogspot.com, where you are, of course, welcome to join and to participate.
BEYOND THE ASSUMED: OBJECT POETRY AS AN EXPRESSIVE RESOURCE

Author: Carlos Jiménez

This experience begins when, after a short training in braille and typhlo-technology, I’m kindly invited to join the incipient “Club LecturONCE Barcelona”, a shared-reading open group under Elvira’s coordination, the always inspiring educator and librarian from the ONCE (Spanish Institute for the Blind). Along five months, around 10-15 people from different backgrounds (professors, students, poets, rhapsodists...) ranging from 15 to 82 years old, constituted as a community of practice, met weekly to learn and enjoy reading, creating and declaiming poetry together.

This group was integrated by visual and non-visual impaired mates. Braille and Roman alphabet books coexisted on the table. As a sign of initial embarrassing ignorance, I was shocked at the discovery that several false myths around blindness, perception and disabilities in general must be overthrown by those we? who are meant to contribute to a better society through designing for all.

“The essential is invisible to the eyes”, this Saint Exupery’s sentence included in The Little Prince, unfolded its whole meaning and potentiality here.

Within this context, I proposed a workshop to create poetry using daily, humble objects. The object poetry has been practiced widely since the first XXth century avant-gardes, yet it is relatively unknown by wider audiences used to a more classical written and versed poetry. Authors like André Breton defined it as a composition that tends to combine resources from poetry and plastic arts, speculating about its reciprocal exaltation power. For writer Octavio Paz, this is “an amphibian creature living among two elements: the sign and the image, the visual art, and the verbal art. An object-poem can be simultaneously contemplated and read”. On his side, Catalan poet Joan Brossa, affirmed that a thing may have a sense, but the poet can take it, turn it and give a different meaning to it. For him, metaphors can be made either from words or objects. In fact, for him objects are metaphors by themselves.

There was one more reason to experiment with object poems which I used it as a working hypothesis during the workshop; we easily get used to obstacles, built environment and material culture deficiencies in general. And most of the times we accept it as something normal. We take it for granted and we don’t apply our creativity potential in daily life as we could. So, by exploring the hidden expressive possibilities of things playfully, trying to go beyond their assumed functionalities, we may find new answers and broaden our previous limitations.

So we, as active and creative individuals, host the capacity to change those things not fitting our preferences.

I proposed the assistants to bring a common object with them from their homes as a base to poetic creation. We experimented with des- and re- contextualization, modification or annulment of one or more of its main functionalities, we looked for formal analogies, we put it in improbable contact with other objects, we changed its name… We learnt that rhetoric figures (such as metaphor, synecdoche, metonymy…) can be applied not only to literature but also to our everyday life. The closer the objects are to us, rooted to our memories, the more we get surprised when they are modified unexpectedly. Using semiotic terms, some kind of frution occurs when the allomorphic result replaces the expected isomorphism. For instance, one of the blind participants told cheeky grin- that when she was a child, she challenged her limitations ingeniously by using the umbrella upturned as a basket to catch as many candies as possible among those thrown to the crowd during the Christmas cavalcades.

The results from this workshop, together with several explorations around shared reading, were exposed in a final party at the ONCE’s library (a few images are included). The modified objects addressed a wide range of questions with a lot of humor, absurdity, irony and criticisms: a juice squeezer for tennis balls, a Guardia Civil hat (Spanish army), white glove filters to retain taxes and commissions from dirty businesses, braille chocolates including poems to be read, shared and eaten, an educative device to learn braille using egg cases, a replica of the “spring water” sandals used by immigrants to escape from police after crossing the salty and dangerous Gibraltar Strait, and many others.

Here at the end, objects were just things that let us start conversations to talk about Things, understood as everyone’s concerning issues. Through object poetry, we assembled socio-material narrations and networks.

Typhlo-technology is the adaptation and accessibility of the TIC for its use and benefit by blind people or visually disabled persons.
TACTILE KNOWLEDGE THROUGH TEXTILES

Author: Marina Castán

Tactile knowledge through textiles is an approach to the relationship between textiles and people from feelings and senses, especially touch.

According to Robin Dunbar, a British anthropologist, touch began as a communication tool before spoken language was and is perhaps the most social of the senses. Touching a person causes an immediate response, which affects our emotions, "touch is also being touched." As children, our hands have been a tool for playing: to draw shapes in the sand, lines on a foggy window or play with other children's hands.

Our senses are linked together to provide more information and an accurate knowledge from everything around us. For instance, the ear sense can provide or enhance us the tactile information. If we touch a rough fabric, the noise from the feedback amplifies the action. If we do the same using a pair of earphones we deprive us of that auditory response, tactile sensation would be different and therefore it would force ourselves to pay more attention to the strict sense of touch.

Regarding to textiles, touch sense is really relevant to feelings and comfort level, especially when we use them to dress ourselves. But beyond this basic need and in the current context of innovative proposals in textile design, we see that many existing interactions as illuminate a textile, release aromas or generate vibrations in a garment are carried out by touching.

In this context of new textile materials that have a direct relationship to the touch, arises the research proposal: to create a playful interaction on a textile through touch sense, with the intention of making it visible. In order to get that, I experiment with thermo-chromic pigments applied to a fabric by screen printing, causing a color change on it when it is touched (temperature). In this way, the sense of touch is enhanced by becoming "visually". This is a proposal - performance, where interactions are created on a large-size textile, leaving an ephemeral footprint.

The exhibition consists on 2 explanatory cardboards (text + images), large size thermo-chromic textiles (interactive) and thermo-chromic small samples with different senses of touch.
To find answers to this question I start from ergonomics, applied science to design that studies the behavior of the human body and its relationship with the environment. This has permitted not only focus on touch sense but their relationship with the rest of the senses.

The major of the senses are located in the head (smell, taste, sight and ear), but the sense of touch is along our whole body, some areas are more sensitive (lips, fingertips, cheeks) while others are less (trunk, arms and legs).

This happens depending on the number of receptors in these areas, and each receptor is specialized to be sensitive to heat, cold, pain, or touch pressure. To make this possible our skin has the capacity to receive thermal, mechanical or chemical stimuli, and each one involved the sensors, called corpuscles.

An example of this type of receptors is the Meissner’s corpuscles or touch corpuscles, with sensitive touch endings. Corpuscles that are in the fingerprints transmit nerve impulses rapidly during the first moments so they are the first one to detect when something is sharp or soft.

To translate this into feelings world, the aim of this research, I've made a research test based, in order to separate the different kind of mechanic-receptors that we use when we touch something. The challenge was to make the knowledge easier and convert it in something participatory. To show this I have created a series of posters that explain some interesting corpuscles.
FEELING NATURE: FROM ENVIRONMENTAL ERGONOMICS TO TREEHUGGING

Authors: Tito Favaro and Jon Marín

With the aim of contributing to the Touch project, during the month of March 2011, a workshop in nature to explore the physical and natural environment through the sense of touch was developed. It took place in Viladrau (Girona, Catalonia) with the professors Jon Marín and Tito Favaro (from the Product and Interior Design Department of ESDi) and the 3rd year students of Product Design. The objective was to experience outdoor group dynamics that help to perceive our surroundings without the aid of sight. The feelings of the participants were collected on video and in photographs, which some of them are shown below.

The exercises were distributed throughout the afternoon and began with a relaxing action on the river: after lunch, participants enjoyed 20 minutes free to find a space to accommodate themselves and to perceive all that is immediate around them (1 squared meter) through all their senses. Most areas were chosen by the water and they experienced, mainly through their feet (but also face, hands, chest,...) the different soil surfaces.

Once the participants had adapted to the natural environment and felt comfortable, a blindfolded journey was performed. The fellow behind the front guided through a club that united them. This tour ended in the forest, making the point where the last game activity related to the senses (touch, guidance, trust, humor ...) took place: Treehugging.

Treehugging: in pairs, one blindfolded and the other escorts him to a tree. The tree will be explored through touch by the blindfolded. When finished, both return to the meeting point (through a different way), blindfolded is released from the band and he will have to find the chosen tree. What at first was a forest becomes a collection of all individual trees. Once found, the tables are turned.

These dynamics allowed them to experience the sense of touch in nature, not just textures, but also being able to navigate and understand the environment from the friction of the wind on the face, the incidence of sunlight on the skin or moisture detection with the soles of the feet. And to be aware and respect the nature. The result of the experiment thus becomes the own experimentation.

In fact, these were the conclusions drawn from sharing the feelings of each participant. In the end, everyone expressed what they had learned or what they felt with a stone used to make a shared humble piece of land-art.
THE BREAD EXPERIENCE
Author: Ivan Merino (ESDi professor and baker)

Bread dough is a soft, multisensorial material which acquires interesting shapes and textures. Some of the best artists, such as Salvador Dalí or Pablo Picasso, have found in bread a source of inspiration. Also in my work process this living material is useful to express my art through different concepts and symbolic objects. For the Touch Project, I've been experimenting in two complementary lines: on the one hand, collaborating with Nadezhda Savova's research around bread culture. The dough was used to give shape to toys, characters and narrative elements so as to communicate and express stories, fairytales from different cultures. This workshop took place in Byala, Bulgaria, at the end of June of 2011.

On the other hand, I've been developing the “Cap de Pa (Bread Head)” series in Sabadell. The inspiration of hair forms, the art of hairdresser and how to work on the head. In touch words, we really feel sensations when our head has hair or hats on it... weight, movement, temperature, naked, etc. This project and performance has taken place in a real hairdresser's (www.annaferrer.com).
FROM TOUCHING TO “SEEING TO BELIEVE”. A PARADIGM SHIFT ALONG THE HISTORY
Author: Ricardo Guixà (ESDi professor and photographer)

It seems evident that the comprehension of the world around us is directly related to the sensitive experience provided by the senses. According to neuropsychologist A.R. Luria: “Sensations allow human beings to perceive the signals and to reflect properties and attributes from the external world, as well as the organism states. They link us with the world, thus becoming an essential source of knowledge as the main condition for a person’s psychic development.” In this process, each one of the five senses delivers a diverse kind of information which our own physiology, together with the cultural conventions from different eras, have hierarchized depending on the reliability of the data provided. Sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch, open the brain doors in the adaptation process to the environment under the basic premises of survival.

For human beings, the sense of touch is probably the first to establish connection to the world, the one that let us feel the mother’s skin and the environment. It will continue as a solid reference for the rest of our life, at least for basic needs, i.e. to drink and to reproduce. This sense is fundamental as it constitutes the base of our perceptions, as far as the rest are considered specializations from this one. Attending to our daily experience, it seems evident that the sense of sight is primordial in human beings. In fact, it can be considered dominant respecting to the other four, and the one we are more dependent from. “More than 80% of the stimuli received by contemporary big cities’ inhabitants is analyzed through the visual perception mechanism”. The loss of vision radically transforms anyone’s existence. The visual impaired has to readapt even the most basic activities and routines in order to live with certain autonomy.

Paradoxically, in spite of its undoubted relevance in today’s life and in the study of cognitive processes, this situation was completely different if we look History back. In fact, in the Ancient times, reality of things could only be verified with guarantees through the sense of touch. It became the sense endowed with the highest veracity. For Aristotle, the sense of touch was the most important and one of the bases for human intelligence.

During the following centuries, this prerogative of the tactile prevails, due in part to the closeness between the source of knowledge and the perception system. The sense of touch allowed people to distinguish between the tangible and the intangible, the truth and the false. Several biblical episodes include this; for instance, Saint Thomas touching Christ body to confirm his resurrection; or when Maria Magdalene, trying to verify it, is advised by Him: “Noli me tangere” (see Tiziano's painting, 1512). The sense of sight replaced the touch as the one able to provide us a more reliable and precise information from the existing reality.

This division between the physical, tangible body and the soul's intangibility derives from the philosophic currents that established a duality between the material and the spiritual. For example in Plato's Allegory of the Cave, the limited reliability offered by the senses, due to the fact that the veritable nature of things is located in the ideas world, escaping to our sensitive perceptions. “Sensitive objects are nothing but weak resemblances of immutable and eternal realities as the ideas are. And these are only accessible to the intelligent and rational part of our soul (...). Ideas or intelligible objects can be perceived in its purity through the dialectics as a supreme science or through representations used in mathematical disciplines”. This conception of reality was taken up again and qualified by Renaissance humanism centuries later, constituting the base of the Cartesian thinking, inciting a paradigm shift in the conception of knowledge that led to a new revalorization of the visual.

Historically, a significant shift in the western mentality began during the Renaissance period, fostered by social and political transformations, and thus provoking that the up till then reality's knowledge evaluation evolved towards a new paradigm dominated by the sense of sight. Philosophical tradition inherited from the Middle Ages is then rejected. Fundamental knowledge methods as dialectics and syllogisms are substituted by “skepticism and science of experience, the historic ideal of humanism and the new philosophy of the nature”. In conclusion, the preeminence of the sense of sight replaced the touch as the one able to provide us a more reliable and precise information from the existing reality.


Sensitive objects are nothing but weak resemblances of immutable and eternal realities as the ideas are. And these are only accessible to the intelligent and rational part of our soul (...). Ideas or intelligible objects can be perceived in its purity through the dialectics as a supreme science or through representations used in mathematical disciplines”. This conception of reality was taken up again and qualified by Renaissance humanism centuries later, constituting the base of the Cartesian thinking, inciting a paradigm shift in the conception of knowledge that led to a new revalorization of the visual.

The Color project starts from the will of exploring beyond the traditional concept of getting dressed, searching for new possibilities and non-solved needs. Aside of the aesthetic and visual part of the clothing, which is the most explored, we wanted to add the other senses in order to create a new way of relating to it. Color tries to explore the tactile aspect of clothes, trying to understand the way that people who has that sense more developed, like visually impaired people, related with this element in order to bring this new experience to the global of society. The main purpose is to abandon the act of getting dressed as an aesthetic action and to become a sensitive act of comfort which doesn’t exclude the visually impaired, on the contrary, the aim is to introduce the people to a new texture world and to challenge them into discovering the communicative immensity of the different textures the cloth uses and the braille language. To sum up, the color project consists on a set of basic T-Shirts for men and women with different textures and without color, only white, grey and black. The simple forms of these t-shirts allow us to focus exclusively in their touch and functionality. These clothes other than experimenting with tact, they use the braille language as an element of game with touch, and at the same time aesthetic, but also as a functional element, providing information about the cloth for those who read it, such as the size, material, models and the name of the sensation we associate with the textile.
SENSORY TOURISM PROGRAMS
Authors: Mireia Murciano, Bentagai Pérez, Ibai Velilla (founders of: Guenyos, design studio experiences and students from 3rd course)

Sensory tourism programs, are the development of tourist routes across the city of Barcelona, using all the senses except sight. Imagine yourself explaining the holiday trip to your relatives and friends, without showing a picture, how would you do it?

People are not blind; we are predisposed to the visual world around us, to the point where we construct reality through images and to the detriment of the other four senses. So much information wasted!!!

The aim with this project is, firstly, to remove the potential to enrich people's sensory perception in relation to the environment. That is, anyone can sit on the couch at home and enjoy a wonderful view of the Sagrada Familia, the end of the day, it only takes a photo.

What a difference it would have walked among its pillars and a conscious, feel touch the ground on his feet, smells, sounds, in short, any information that is only possible through our sensory experiences that are not summarized in an image.

On the other hand, the second objective is to go against mass tourism, and scheduled. We propose the concept of “slow tourism”, tourism that takes time to know those details that make it unique to a city, away from the willingness of the guidebooks.

Finally and ultimate goal is to make an integrated effort among blind people, their organizations and the local population. In this project there are no differences between disabled and “normal” and there is much less with tourists, since the latter also come to know the local population.
IBO, INTERNATIONAL BLIND ORGANIZATION
Authors: Astrid Vives, Maria Hernández, Ainara Carreras (students from 2nd course)

The original idea of IBO is an unreal foundation, invented by the same project creators. IBO is the abbreviation of International Blind Organization, because we didn't arrange with the collaboration of any entity.

The IBO's project consists on an audiovisual creation as a publicity campaign for a foundation or association of people with some kind of visual disease. With this project we want to become aware people of all problems and troubles people with visual disease have in public spaces.

In order to create the advertisement destined to foment collaboration with the foundation we needed to recollect information about other advertisements that have already existed before, with the same experience of no visual sense in a short route with a blind person, interviewing this person to know how do this people feel and what do they want to improve about their live to make it easier. The principal objective of our campaign proposal is to show the everyday of all those blind people into the public space to make the spectator empathize with this community. This has been possible thanks to the common situations simulations we did with people with visual diseases in situations where they are discriminated. That's the reason why in all the video we only find an image at the end of the advertisement, which is the name of the foundation and a slogan. We only counted with the sound recourse to create our project. The advertisement starts when the person comes out from the house and closes the door. He keeps walking in the street when he founds the first obstacle: a bump. He keeps walking when he perceives a second trouble: a zebra crossing with a semaphore with no sound dispositive. To go beyond that problem, he needs external help to cross with safety. His narration makes us understand that there aren't too many people willing to help. At last, He's walking to a cinema, where he asks for a ticket. This situation helped us to finish the advertisement, because blind people, in some cinemas, they have a reduced rate of adapted films. They are narrated especially for people with visual diseases, so they feel comfortable to realize this activity, because they don't feel socially discriminated thanks to that.
SENSEPLAY: A MULTISENSORIAL INCLUSIVE BOARDGAME TO HAVE FUN AND LEARN
Authors: Arnau Aguilar, Marta Álvarez, Judit Carrera (students from 2nd course)

We have created a board game which enhances the different senses of each player, regardless their disabilities. In this way, the game encourages interaction between people, empathy and the ability to understand and appreciate senses.

The dynamic of the game is to conduct various tests in which, by canceling some of the ways, the player should be able to identify a culinary item. First of all, roll the dice, which contain different colors that will be related to the squares on the board. For example, in the unlikely event that we play the red box would go to the taste. Tone should take one of the tabs for that category and the test that is written in it. In the case of not passing the test, the team cannot advance to the next level and if it is exceeded it can advance itself. As an exception to these tests may also be “black test”. By landing on this box, the player will decide whether to perform or not. In case that he do not, the player will stay stuck at the level, and in the opposite case, the player must perform a test that is unpleasant or higher difficulty. In the event that the player fails to meet the challenge, he cannot move the data from the site and must wait for the next turn, but if successful, he will receive the reward that shows the letter even though this may be good or bad i.e. forward or back boxes.

The objective is, therefore, reach the final square having overcome the other team, but learning and enjoying together.
The TOUCH Lab
Cultura21 Nordic

CONCEPT

The aim of TOUCH LAB is to increase affective understanding and sensitivity. Through this aim, we want to make it possible at once for blind and sight-impaired people and for sighted people to get a sensory, affective, reflective, and creative experience of the relation between art and senses.

TOUCH LAB is a spatial-performatory installation that invites blind/sight impaired audience or others that are voluntarily blindfolded, to take part in experiencing the relation between art-making and blindness/sight.

TOUCH LAB as an installation investigates in and experiments with how we can experience visual art from a blind/sight impaired perspective, through reception, intuition, and creation. The lab exercises focus on tactility in various forms, and on all five senses and intuition working together to allow for blind and tactile creation of art.

The lab will make it possible to work through the senses that are directly available to blind/sight impaired people: touch, taste, smell, hearing, and movement. The last ingredient in the lab is intuition, serving as the necessary guide through all of the above senses and their translation into artistic expression.

As can be seen in the illustration, the lab is physically constructed as a labyrinth or cochlea. The participant is guided by the architecture of the installation to move from one room to the next, ending in the centre of the cochlea. The separate rooms function as a series of sense-experiences:

- The **audio** experience consists of a series of short audio recordings from different parts of the world and of very different character (we have tested a.o. street sounds, birds, music, talk, children, city noises, traffic), without any further explanation than the audio file itself; the experience of the sounds is disconcerting due to their differences and the need to link them to one another without guidelines.

- The **tactile** experience includes a number of very different objects that can be touched (such as small statues, matchboxes, kitchen utensils, an old phone, tools, a branch, a flower, a stuffed animal, fruit), the participant is asked to recall and reconstruct the experience of each particular object through the emotional or cognitive images that it arouses.

- The **smell & taste** exercise places the participant in the middle of a number of sources of smell, that together from the impression of a meal, a kitchen, or building on the well known from cooking, leading eventually to tasting random objects and mixing the impressions of the smell with the taste to create a re-doubling of the “madeleine” image from Proust.

- The **mobility** experience is a silent walk through a corridor with sensory experiences placed in the walls and floor for the participants to walk on, walk into and experience with hands, feet or cheeks; the experience is a combination thus of movement in itself and tactile experiences; this experience is part of each of the other experiences and is repeated at the end by itself, without releasing into one of the other experiences (see drawing 1).

A certain aspect of collective experience is also present, but in the muted form of being able to vaguely sense the presence of the others going through the lab. But the main experience form is solitary, to increase the sense experience.

At end of the journey to the centre, the participant is invited to express his/her affective and intuitive response on a small 20x20 canvas, with paint and other available materials. After the session, the canvas is exhibited on the outer wall of the snail, so that all the pictures can eventually form a wall of expression of the blind-senses-art encounter. This can also be folded into a web site, which may be more compatible with smaller sessions, where the lab is part of a more local workshop.

It is important to highlight, however, that the main focus of the installation lies in the movements and experiences, rather than on the final works created by non-seeing participants. The essential part is not as much the creation of more or less tactile art, but the relation between reception, reflection and intuition that we seek to create through the experiences.
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It is important to highlight, however, that the main focus of the installation lies in the movements and experiences, rather than on the final works created by non-seeing participants. The essential part is not as much the creation of more or less tactile art, but the relation between reception, reflection and intuition that we seek to create through the experiences. The reason for the canvas at the end is that it highlights the dependency on intuition and openness, as the participant, whether blind or not, can not see what he/she creates. Some of it can be felt/touched, but other parts of it are only visible to observers.

The full experience is expected to last about 40 minutes per participant. In an exhibition setting, this will allow for a flow of participants going through, so that around 20-30 participants can go through it in a 6-hour day. We have been working since the beginning of the year on the development of the concept for this 'mobile laboratory'. In the second workshop in Copenhagen, this process was guided and took place in dialogue with the guide. We suggest that we keep the guide in the final version of the lab, mainly to secure a comfortable and pleasant experience for the participants. But the guide will be instructed not to speak, as the dialogue replaces force with digested meaning and weakens the final work with the canvas.

This way, the participant may feel a bit uneasy, but only enough to make them rely on intuition, openness, expressive force and trust. There will be a dialogue going on constantly, between the participant and the sense-exercises, the participant and the canvas, and the participant and the imagined viewer. The experience will of course also invite the participants to discuss it with each other, as soon as they have finished the canvas. This points towards carrying out the lab in a place that has a café or similar reflection space or to build it into workshops or working days e.g. in organizations.

Report from the workshops in Copenhagen

After having been in contact with several expert institutes around the life of the blind and sight-impaired and especially focused on their relation to visual and other forms of art, and after conducting two workshops with a number of participants with varying degrees of blindness, we have been able to develop and proto-test a concept for how to work with tactility and visual art for blind and sight impaired people.

This concept is still on a prototype stage. We have developed the blueprint for how to carry out the TOUCH lab, being pretty certain that this would lead to challenging and innovative results and experiences in the field between art, learning, blindness and public engagement.

The lab concept is based on two main ideas: first, that moving from blindness or severe sight impairment to visual art requires working through the medium of intuition. Second, it has been our experience in this as well as in many other workshops, that an improved access to intuition is gained through working with different senses and through an innovative contact with the material, with things. Working with intuition is challenging, whether you are sight impaired or not, as it requires opening up and going through emotional channels as well as through accepting that we cannot answer everything rationally. Especially the second workshop was very instructive as to how our participants reacted to the invitation to co-create visual artworks. Our conclusion so far is that it would make good sense to go ahead with the final creation of the lab, and to include it in an exhibition, as it could fairly easily be moved from one cultural context to another.

We are confident that the lab would be able to add to meeting the aims of the project, by on the one hand opening up for new experiences and reflections for blind and sight impaired people regarding not only receiving, but also creating art. And on the other, by allowing for the general public to experience the relation between blindness / sight impairment and art and hopefully challenge some of the common prejudices. Both of these achievements would add, in our eyes, to the many elements that are needed to enhance the resilience and cultural sustainability of our cultures. On the following pages, you will find a short description of the two workshops and of the ideas for the lab. A visual presentation of the lab will be ready for the project meeting in Copenhagen on 15th-17th of September.
1. Workshop 1  
digging into blindness and art

The first workshop took place in April 2011, at the Institute for the Blind and sight impaired (IBOS) just outside of Copenhagen. Apart from our 3 recruited participants, there were also 3 participants that were taking part in an art class at the institute. Visual artist Nikolai Troest, project leader Oleg Koefoed, and project co-worker Kajsa Paludan were also present from Cultura21. The workshop lasted for about 3 hours. The agenda for this workshop was to get a deeper understanding of the pros and cons of working with visual and tactile art with blind and sight impaired people. Before the workshop, we had conversations both with some of the people working at the institute, especially those working either with art or with communication, as well as with a psychologist with many years of experience with working with blind and sight impaired people. Our ambition was to let the conversation be guided by the artistic approach of a visual artist, Nikolai, and the approach to art, visual or other, of blind people with experience with art, but not working as professional artists. Our participants had a very varied degree of experience with art — one of them was even a visual artist herself (technically blind=less than 6/60 vision, but with “tunnel sight” allowing her to see the colours that she uses). Another participant expressed strong feelings, but mostly of inhibition and fear related to both the use and the creation of art (technically blind=less than 6/60 vision, but with “tunnel sight” allowing her to see the colours that she uses). Another participant was actually creating art for herself; the participants in the art class expressed very austere relations to the creation of art

experience: smell, hearing, movement, touching of objects — and to express their thoughts and emotions on a canvas between every one of the 4 exercises. This part of the workshop lasted for about 2 1/2 hours, followed by a discussion over a light meal. We observed the participants closely and also asked them about how they saw the workshop and its effect upon them.

The experience was clearly very different for the different participants, and their ability to express themselves was also of very varied quality. Mainly, it became clear that the exercises relied very much on openness in the receptive part of the session, and intuition in the creative part (or on intuition going through from reception to creation). Thus, the more inhibited participants with less self-confidence found it very hard to accept the associative parts of the exercise, and equally hard to express their feelings in the painting part. We had deliberately chosen not to let them work with other tactility-based expressive tools than colours on canvas, as we wanted to test this idea. Being pretty confident that other tactile tools such as clay, sculptural paint (oil rather than acrylic paint), wood, etc, would work out for blind/sight impaired, we tested the concept to the limit. And we wanted to test this idea. Being pretty confident that other tactile tools such as clay, sculptural paint (oil rather than acrylic paint), wood, etc, would work out for blind/sight impaired, we tested the concept to the limit. And the conclusion that we have drawn is that the approach is simply too selective or exclusive. So we suggest using a combination of colours and other materials, still on canvas, but in a way that makes it possible to a larger extent for the participant to feel/touch the work that they create. For instance, they will be able to make “lines” across the canvas with wood or clay, and then fill out the spaces with colours if they feel confident enough about it. The conclusion from this workshop is that the idea behind the lab is feasible, but must be carried out with great sensitivity.

2. Workshop 2  
testing the concept

For the second workshop at the end of April in Copenhagen, we invited 5 blind / highly sight impaired participants to come to the Project House on Enghavevej for a 4-hour workshop, to test the ideas we wanted to use for the lab. The 5 participants were a mix of male and female, young and older (27 to 62), and experienced in working with art to no at all experienced. All participants were asked to go through a series of exercises based on sense experiences: smell, hearing, movement, touching of objects — and to express their thoughts and emotions on a canvas between every one of the 4 exercises. This part of the workshop lasted for about 2 1/2 hours, followed by a discussion over a light meal. We observed the participants closely and also asked them about how they saw the workshop and its effect upon them.

The observations from the workshop were the following: all participants had a quite strong sense of spatial intuition, but only some of them use this in other aspects of contact with materials; for instance when working with what they understand as art, our participants tended to rely much more on their direct material experience — making it hard to use imagination or intuition as the base for creative exercises (we decided to test this further to see how big the problem would be); all participants enjoyed art of varying kinds, from music to literature, sculpture, and some quantity of visually expressed art (but of course this was what motivated them to be present); the experience of art was important for all of them to feel the more aesthetic qualities of life, and gave them ways of sensing and sharing with friends, family of even readers (a participant had written a novel and is working on the second one) — but only one participant was actually creating art for herself; the participants in the art class expressed very austere relations to their work they saw it more as a way to make objects, than as an aesthetic experience with its own qualities (they did not relate at all to the aesthetic qualities of the cloth when they were weaving, for instance, although they did refer to an ability to feel the difference between different cloth colours); all participants seemed open to going through a more direct challenge in terms of feeling and creating works of art (or something artistically inspired); for the visual artist, learning about the way the blind / sight impaired led especially to a strong reaction towards their spatial abilities when moving through a room, and how this was done based on a strong degree of intuition.
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Oleg Koefoed  Project and workshop leader // Nikolai Troest  visual artist //Kajsa Li Paludan  Project and workshop co-worker //Helle Ansholm Rasmussen  Project and workshop co-worker // Karsten Tadie  Project and workshop co-worker //Mette Skau Smølz  Workshop co-worker
International Arts Symposium in Byala, Bulgaria, in June 2011

Atanas Tollyakov
Nadezhda Savova
Carlos Jimenez
Marina Castán
Mariana Prodanova
Kristin Rasolkova
Tito Favaro
Ivan Merino

TOUCH
Opening of TouchVille in the atrium of the ESDi, Sabadell Higher School of Design

Touch Project is an initiative of the Interior and Product Unit of the ESDi. Collaborating institutions in Bulgaria and Denmark, especially these:

- Cultural Association Fabrikata (Bulgaria)
- The artist and creator of the concept 'Touch Project', Atanas Totlyakov (University of Veliko Turnovo),
- International Council for Cultural Centers, the International Network Bread Houses and Culture 21 Nordic (Denmark)

The research of the project are:

- "Poem and Object multisensory training" (Metallica)
- "Identity hidden objects" (Titus Favaro)
- "Knowledge touch through tissue" (Marina Castán)
- "The bread experience" (Ivan Merino)