

The Special Individualized Programs of the School of Graduate Studies
in association with the Concordia Sensoria Research Team (CONCERT)
and the Department of Sociology and Anthropology present

Art and the Etiquette of Touch

with **Fiona Candlin** (Birkbeck College, London)

Friday, November 18, 2011 10 am

H-1120, 11th Floor, Hall Building
1455 de Maisonneuve Boulevard West

This talk begins with a proposition – that we abandon the study of ‘touch’. I argue that recent models of touch, as they appear within discourses of art and museums, have been distinctly troublesome. There has been a tendency to attribute distinct characteristics to touch and to link it with particular groups: to claim that it is capable of creating harmonious social relations or that it has strategic potential for feminist artists. Within galleries it is posited as a simple mode of engagement with art objects, suitable for access provision or, when it occurs without permission, as evidence of ignorance and unruliness. Almost invariably, touch is understood as having no or little significant variation. There are also problems with its definition and what that encompasses and whether touch is applicable to the bulk of art practice.

My suggestion is that instead of discussing ‘touch’ we adopt a notion of ‘tactual practice’. I close the presentation with some examples of what that might mean for the study of art.

Fiona Candlin worked in the education department at Tate Liverpool, and in the School of Architecture and Art History at Liverpool University, before being appointed to a lectureship jointly held by Birkbeck and the British Museum in 2000. In this role she established and organised the World Arts and Artefacts Certificate programme run in partnership with the British Museum. Fiona is now course director of the MA in Museum Cultures. She is the coeditor of *The Object Reader* (2009) and the author of *Art, Museums and Touch* (2010), a volume in the Rethinking Art’s Histories series from Manchester University Press.

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