The dusty museum

INKERI HAKAMIES

Abstract: *Dust is a significant problem for museums – not only from the point of view of conservation, but also because it has a negative effect on the museum's image. In this paper, I analyse the cultural connotations of museum dust: Why is dust in a museum so appalling, and, consequently, what do people really mean by the word pair dusty museum? The empirical material of this study consists of interview and questionnaire material produced as part of a national Finnish museum history project between 2005 and 2011. In the analysis, museum dust has been treated as a material element of social practices. Tangible dust is a material element in many museum practices, but dust can also be a concept used to describe the wrong kind of museum. Museum dust and dusty museums are both discursive practices that reflect ideas of what museums should or shouldn't be.*

Keywords: Finland, dust, practices, museum views, marketing.

What is museum dust made of? Technically speaking it consists of two kinds of dust: fibrous particulates, emanating from the museum objects, the visitors, and their clothing, and non-fibrous particulates: skin, soil, building dust, insect fragments, pollen, pollutants, and so on. When it accumulates, it attracts insects, which attract other pests, it sticks to the artefacts, and encourages rust or mould to grow and leads to corrosion (Shah, Hunter & Adams 2011:19–20; Hartley 2017). These are some of the reasons why museum professionals have for decades expended a lot of effort to protect museum objects against dust. Conservators Bhavesh Shah, Susana Hunter, Stuart Adams, Anne Bancroft and Val Blyth (2011:25) also remark that finding “unsightly” levels of dust in an exhibition detracts from the visitors’ experience, thus changing “the perception of

an exhibition, and of the institution”. Clearly dust – especially in a museum – also carries social and cultural meanings.

The premise for this article is that dust exists in the physical realm, but it also has a more abstract form: dust is what “people have thought it to be” (Russell 2000, x). In fact, Mary Douglas (1984:2) has suggested that there is no “absolute dirt”, but dirt only exists “in the eye of the beholder”. Therefore, what is *dirty* is always defined within a social system, and reproduced in everyday practices, like laundering or showering (Shove 2003:85). Gary Fine and Tim Hallett claim that dust belongs to a moral narrative. According to them, the presence of dust “represents a failure of control over the environment” and whereas cleanliness is considered virtuous, dust is threatening; a “moral breakdown” (Fine & Hallett 2002:2–4).

So, what is this *immoral* museum dust made of? Why is a dusty museum or dust in a museum so appalling? In this paper, I follow the traces of museum dust to find out what sort of an element dust is in museum practices, what kind of meanings and values lie underneath it, and what the museum idea is that these practices reflect.

FRAMES OF THE STUDY

This paper is part of my ongoing doctoral research, where I study the oral history of the Finnish museum field. The study focuses on social practices related to museums and examines what sort of cultural meanings they carry. The principal components of the research material consist of questionnaire and interview material produced as part of a Finnish museum history project between 2005 and 2011.¹ The project was coordinated by the Finnish Museums Association and implemented together with the National Board of Antiquities, the Finnish Museum of Natural History, the Finnish National Gallery, and the departments of museology at the Universities of Helsinki, Jyväskylä and Turku.

The material contains biographical interviews of museum professionals who started their careers in the mid-twentieth century. One of the focal points of the template interview question sheet was the development of the museum profession, but other topics were also discussed. The interviewees mostly represent the Finnish national museum organizations, and especially the scientific or managerial museum staff, with a few exceptions. The interviews were conducted by various volunteer interviewees, who were also from the museum field. Altogether there are 52 interviews, and they are archived in various organizations and listed in the project's database.² The interviewees have

given their consent to the material being used for research purposes and for quotations from the interviews to be published under their name. The interviewers, however, were not explicitly asked for such consent, and therefore they will remain anonymous.

The questionnaire *My museum memories*,³ carried out in 2007 to 2008, was targeted at the "wide audience" and was conducted together with the Finnish Literature Society's archive.⁴ The questionnaire was distributed to the archive's regular respondent network and published online. The material produced consists of 496 pages written by 39 respondents. A summary of the material has been previously published by Mari Hatakka (2010). The questions were thematic and open-ended, and the respondents were asked, for example, what their first museum visit was like, where their "spark" for museums originates, and what kind of exhibitions they found interesting or disappointing.

The empirical motivation for this paper arose from reading and analysing the questionnaire answers. The way the word *dusty* was used in the context of museums that apparently didn't please the respondent triggered my interest – especially since the type of the museums that were described as "dusty" could vary greatly depending on the viewpoints of the respondents. As often happens, this initial notion made me pay closer attention to the usage of the word, and dust became a clue that I followed through the material. What did the visitors really mean to say, when they called a museum dusty? Did the museum professionals have anything to say about it in their interviews? What sort of contexts does dust lead to?

Theoretically, my approach derives from studies of social practices and the wide field of Practice Theory. According to Andreas

Reckwitz (2002:249), practices include forms of bodily and mental activities, “‘things’ and their use” and background knowledge, such as “know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge”. Elizabeth Shove, Mika Pantzar and Matt Watson, who focus on the changes in social practices, have simplified this idea and treat practices as a combination of three elements: *material elements*, *meanings* and *competences*. In their analysis, they examine the life of these elements: how they are linked with each other, and how those links break over time when practices and their cultural or social meanings are reshaped (Shove *et al.* 2012:21–25). Whereas Shove *et al.*’s perspective focuses on rather concrete actions that involve the use of some specific material *thing*, Reckwitz considers practices to also include routinised ways “in which bodies are moved, objects are handled, subjects are treated, things are described and the world is understood”. In his opinion, “a practice represents a pattern which can be filled out by a multitude of single and often unique actions reproducing the practice” (Reckwitz 2002:250). In this paper, *practices* are understood in the broader sense as defined by Reckwitz, but the analysis is also inspired by the model of practices-as-elements.

The model of practice-as-elements is a “streamlined approach” to practices (Shove *et al.* 2012:24). However, it should be treated as what it is: an analytical tool that helps a researcher to grasp all the contexts related to the practice in question. Analysing the competences, meanings and material elements linked to a practice is a good starting point, but the elements of a practice could also be defined differently in different research settings, and the elements might not always have an equal value in the combination. Still, it is important to understand that a practice is always dependent on an acting agent’s abilities, as well as shared

understandings and material realities, and for this purpose, I find Shove *et al.*’s analytical concepts helpful.

But what about dust? As a material element, it is slightly unorthodox: Dust is no innovation, it didn’t emerge as a novelty, it doesn’t have rivals, it doesn’t change. It doesn’t really have a history.⁵ According to what Carolyn Steedman (2002:166) calls the *Philosophy of Dust*, it also never fully disappears, but forever circulates on Earth. It is an organic and rather abstract essence, and yet, it is very material and tangible, it has agency and it can have a strong effect on people. It is “stuff” that inspires people to feel and do certain things. Dust is arguably a material element in many practices.

In my analysis, I ask what the museum practices – actions and ideas – that revolve around museum dust are, and what the competences and meanings are that are linked to them. Secondly, I analyse museum dust as an element of practice in its dual form: What sort of a role does dust really have in the practices? How is *museum dust* used, what sorts of meanings does it have, and what kind of an effect does it have on people? The first part of the article deals with encountering museum dust in the material and physical sense. In the second part, I analyse *dusty museums* at a more figurative level, and dig deeper into the meanings related to the concept. In the third and final section, I explore *dusting* as an allegory for renewing the museum brand.

EXPERIENCING MUSEUM DUST

Those who come in closest contact with museum dust are, of course, the staff members who do the actual dusting, conserving, or other maintenance work around the artefacts. As described in one of the interviews with a museum guard, protecting objects against

Fig. 1. Dusty or not? For some, music and craft performances might have made the local heritage feel more “alive”, while others maybe thought that the shows undervalued the scientific work carried out in professional museums.

Local heritage fest outside Heikkilä Museum, Kerava. Photo: Väinö Johannes Kerminen, 1971. Kerava Museum, Collection of Väinö Kerminen.

dust in the exhibition of the National Museum involved a lot of time and physical effort:

Interviewer: So what else [does the exhibition staff need to do] then for example in the mornings – nowadays there’s the difference I assume, that you have to turn on all kinds of computers and multimedia?

Interviewee: Well yeah, that’s a difference, sure, but earlier we had all the covers, we had all the furniture covered up, so we had a whole cover

show. And – and all the wall rugs [*ryijy*] were also covered and there was a whole room full of those, so there was quite a lot of them, so then you had this stick, so with the stick you like lifted them up, so we could get them covered. So you needed two people for that, but you could take them off by yourself.

Interviewer: And every night you put them on, and every morning you took them off.

Interviewee: Yeah, yes, because in the night, then the dust settles. (NBA: Rantanen, Eva.)

What a layperson visiting a museum might not realise is that the museum personnel's fight against the "silent attacker" (Baryla 2011:4) can also guide and limit the visitors' movements in the museum through exhibition planning. For example, conservators Shah, Hunter, Adams, Bancroft and Blyth, who have studied ways to reduce the amount of dust brought in by the visitors, have planned a strategy that includes the following guidelines:

- Objects near entrances and exits are cased or on plinths.
- Twists and turns are encouraged early on to aid the removal of large dust particles from visitors' clothing.
- A minimum one metre distance between objects and visitors [is] maintained.
- One metre high solid barriers are used to shield some vulnerable objects from dust and people. [...] (Shah *et al.* 2011:26.)

Although there are convincing arguments that a museum visitor is an active agent whose movements are not controlled by the exhibition design (e.g. Diamantoloupou & Christidou 2016:2), one still must admit that if the above-mentioned strategy is applied, dust certainly plays a role in the visitors' choreography by adding "twists and turns" to the museum visit. Curatorial intentions about guiding the visitors to follow a certain path may not always be realised, and visitors may act and move unexpectedly. Still, the visitors' movements are always in dialogue with the physical surroundings, meaning the exhibition infrastructure. And, what is more, the mode of movement is an integral part of how the multi-modal meaning-making in a museum is "orchestrated" (Diamantoloupou & Christidou 2016:2, 7). Thus, dust, and more precisely the infrastructure built for avoiding dust, has a

grounding impact on how museum visits are performed and experienced.

What about when the infrastructure is lacking, and dust gathers in the museum? What sort of an effect does dust itself have on museum visits? The most straightforward and drastic example is to do with taking ill. The dusty air can make one feel unwell or uneasy, and in extreme cases also be a cause of disease. As Carolyn Steedman (2002:26–29) has speculated, breathing in the dust in an archive could in fact inflict illnesses, such as anthrax. Catching a serious disease in a museum is admittedly not a common problem, but for some, health issues might be a reason to avoid staying in "dusty museums" for too long: "Museums can sometimes be old and somehow dusty, so I just quickly run through the exhibition rooms, I'm an asthmatic." (Museo 29. 2008. Woman, born in 1934.)

The more common effect is on the general atmosphere that the visitors experience during their visit. The questionnaire respondents connected dust to disorder and dirtiness, and walking through a disarray in a museum could make one feel awkward and repulsed. The effect may also be surprisingly long-lasting:

Perhaps the museum I remember the most is the one in Cairo. There was lots to see. It almost resembled a department store. In Finland we are used to more spacious displays. There was the golden chest of Tutankhamun and all the things he might need in the afterlife. This seediness, the amount of dust and lack of space was unpleasant. Strange that one still remembers this sort of thing after decades. (Museo 8. 2008. Woman, born in 1919.)

However, dust in a museum can also have a positive effect. A visitor study conducted in eight historic houses in the UK shows that the same visitors who recognised that the dusty

rooms smelled “musty”, and expressed that the dust should be removed from the exhibition rooms, also perceived the dusty rooms as more “historic”. According to them, dust “contributed to the spirit of place” (Lithgow *et al.* 2005:665). The Finnish questionnaire material includes a similar example: “The air [in a museum] is stuffy. Dust everywhere. But doesn’t that sort of thing really create the atmosphere of a museum? Those things never bothered me.” (Museo 187. 2007. Man, retired.)

In fact, dust can be considered actual material evidence of history. According to Marder, dust is a “residue of things”, and a “yardstick by which to measure reality”. It “warrants a tangible and, indeed, spatial appearance of time” (Marder 2016:36, 38). The belief that authentic and unique museum objects arouse the most powerful reactions in visitors, and promote curiosity and engagement, is central to “museum lore” (Evans *et al.* 2002:55; Bunce 2016:230). Stating that museums should indeed be dusty resonates with this belief, and defines what is “authentic”. Dust on the object proves that it is truly old and has endured time, and is therefore an authentic historical object. It might also add a bit of mystery and adventure to the atmosphere: a dusty museum room is a place where everything has stayed untouched through time.

People easily accept that dust equals authentic, but dust can also lie. In the American ghost town called Bodie, dust accumulates rapidly and gives the visitors an impression that everything they see there is “natural, like it was left” – when in fact many of the artefacts have been rearranged by staff members (DeLyser 1999:615–616). Dust can also be used to intentionally manipulate viewers and falsely create an authentic look. Christopher B. Steiner (1995:154) has traced a story of a French antiques dealer who used an air compressor to spray dust on a dresser

replica and the surrounding wall to disguise it as original piece of furniture before showing it to a customer.

In summary, dust is present in the practices of maintenance work, exhibition planning, visiting and spectating an exhibition, caring for one’s health, authenticating objects of history, and creating a pleasant or authentic atmosphere in the museum. For Shove *et al.* (2011:17, 87–88), these practices form a *complex*, where the individual practices are integrated and co-dependent: exhibition planning and maintaining work affect museum visiting and experiencing the historic atmosphere. Sometimes dust has only a hidden and elusive role, but in many practices dust could even be considered an active agent: it forces the personnel to arduously cover and uncover the objects on display, and it dictates the visitors’ movements in the exhibition rooms – at least to a certain extent. But, as was suggested in the introduction, the ways in which dust affects people depend on how it is linked to different meanings and ideas, which will be discussed further in the following section.

DUSTY MUSEUM, FIGURATIVELY SPEAKING

Although museum dust might have a positive effect through the practice of authentication, in the questionnaire material it has mostly negative connotations, and is related to disorder, filth, and illnesses. The image of *dusty museums* can even be so encompassing that it prevents people from going to museums at all:

As a child brought up in the Häme countryside and a student of a rural co-ed school, I got to know museums only through school trips. My most enlightened and extremely tidy mother [...] almost hated museums, because “they smelled dusty”, so we

never went to look at any building or place remotely resembling a museum. (Museo 308. 2008. Woman, born in 1947.)

The quotation makes one wonder if dust was the only thing the “extremely tidy mother” was afraid of. In my opinion, it hints that the dustiness of museums also represents some values that don’t fit into the family’s worldviews.

According to Robert Willim, dust is usually associated with uneventfulness and inactivity, and things that are still, dull and out of date. The link between dust and inactivity and stagnation is especially emphasised by people who advocate hygiene and develop and sell cleaning equipment: in their discourse, a dusty home is an inactive, lazy home where allergies and illness spread (Willim 2006:55–59). Michael Marder (2016:8), among others, also points out that dustiness is despised because it represents disorder and lack of care – meaning laziness and low morals.

In some cases, the respondents make comparisons or hint at differences between “dusty museums” and other – better – museums. Describing a museum as *dusty* has many hidden implications. It reveals what kind of museums the respondent considers somehow reprehensible and wrong – and what sort of museums are correspondingly appreciated. Two different forms of museums seem to appear as opposites in the material: unprofessionally and often privately maintained local heritage museums, the type also known as *heimatmuseum* or *hembygdsgård*, and the professional museums, usually bigger in size and located in urban areas.

The following respondent first proclaims that she generally enjoys visiting local heritage museums. However, they still seem to have elements that represent the “terrifying” in museums:

I have always been terrified of how museums have so many interesting objects, but the display and texts are lacking and unclear, and often the artefacts are very dusty. [...] A sad sight it was in Sammatti, where a hand-embroidered woollen blanket [*rekipeitto*], which according to hearsay might have belonged to Elias Lönnrot [author of the Finnish national epic *Kalevala*], had been nailed to the wall with iron nails. It was an old blanket. The museum room was probably kept by an amateur, because all the objects were dusty and also otherwise disorganised. It didn’t entice you to visit. (Museo 409. Woman, born in 1935.)

It is interesting, why the apparent lack of care in a museum should be so important to an outsider. Does it imply that the respondent feels empathy for the museum objects, which in her opinion are not treated with proper respect? I believe it reflects a moral resentment: the respondent has an idea of a museum where objects are appreciated, displays are planned with care, and dust is removed. Not achieving these aspirations means, to her, that the museum caretakers are lacking in morals.

However, some may experience the atmosphere of the local heritage museums as more familiar. Objects lying in display cases without any illustrative context might be perceived as “dead” (Museo 475. 2008. Man, born in 1938), whereas historical house museums are often understood as “real places” presenting “real things” in their original setting (Mårdh 2015:28). In small local museums, the access to the objects is often more immediate, many of the objects are also still being used, and there are no “didactic fingers” being raised (Lohr 1992:156). For example, for the following questionnaire respondent, the “dusty museums” are the bigger city or national museums:

Fig. 2. The producers of the Tampere 1918 exhibition wanted to give its visitors a memorable experience and place them in the middle of the events of the Finnish Civil War. The objects displayed in the exhibition were collected straight from the battlefields on the streets of Tampere by Gabriel Engberg, director of the Häme Museum. (Mäkinen 1918 til 2018; Liuttunen 1918 til 2018.) The visual design of the exhibition represents the chaos that was ruling the city, and the dust and rubble give it a finishing and authenticating touch. Tampere 1918 exhibition in Vapriikki, Tampere. Photo: Marika Tamminen, 2008. Vapriikki Museum Centre.

As country-born I feel at home in Kovero. That is why for so many times I have visited this lively outdoor museum, which to me is the best possible way to get to know one's past. In my opinion Kovero is a better type of a museum than the dusty city museum, where everything feels dead and distant – unlike in Kovero! (Museo 334. 2008. Man, born in 1988.)

Here the dustiness of the city museums refers to stagnation and stillness, whereas in comparison the local outdoor museum is “alive” and dynamic. The local museum is experienced as more authentic – not only because it is atmospherically dusty, but because it is *mentally* un-dusty.

And thus we are brought to museum politics, and debates about the local heritage museums' legitimacy. After the Second World War and the reconstruction era, Finland industrialised and urbanised, old agricultural tools became idle and many traditional farmhouse buildings were left empty – until local heritage activists repurposed them as museums. As befitted the contemporary idea of a “living museum”, the local museums became centres for local heritage and venues for festivities, workshops and performances (Heinonen 2010:164–165; Salminen 2011:94–96). Some museum professionals, however, felt that they didn't meet all the requirements of a museum. Ritva Wäre, the former chief of the Finnish National Museum sums up the discussion in the Finnish museum field in her interview as follows:

I feel that in the seventies, especially due to the ICOM growing stronger, attitudes towards what is a museum, what is a *real* museum, were very strict, almost orthodox. Nowadays one stresses that the audience – you must have an audience coming, you must have people coming, museums have become more liberal, you organise events, and it's important. But in the seventies a museum had to be untouched,

and all these local heritage houses, that followed this Swedish *hembygsgården* model, they were considered phoney places. In general museums that had benches outside for events, folk dances and all, they were not considered real museums. The same goes with ... other museums, where in the seventies they started covering the windows with black cloths, and all... Like in the National Museum they covered a lot of furniture and the emperor's seat with cloths during the night, so that the dust didn't descend on them. This strict attitude made a lot of these museums, in my opinion... rather feeble and rather dull [...]. (NBA: Ritva Wäre.)

It is evident, that the dustiness of the different types of museums has slightly different undertones. The dustiness in small, non-professionally maintained museums is linked to lack of *competencies* (cf. Shove *et al.* 2012:22) and inability to carry out museum practices properly: the amateur staff is perhaps not trained to handle historical objects, and they don't have the required knowledge about preservation and conservation. Combined with scarce funding, this leads to a disorderly appearance and what might seem like lack of care. The dustiness of local heritage museums might also refer to old-fashioned attitudes. The boom in the founding local museums coincided with the post-war nation building, and as Teppo Korhonen has noted, there was a social call for local heritage societies and museums (Korhonen 1989:105–106; see also Heinonen 2010:163–164). Especially to younger generations, who are not as personally involved with the museums or their topics, these places might appear nationalistic and conservative, and too easily inclined to nostalgia.

In the professional museum field, experts develop and adapt best practices, and they have what is regarded as *competence*. The dustiness

of the professional museums is more related to the “strict attitude” that makes them feel “dead and distant”. In the previous quotation, Ritva Wäre also refers to this when she scorns the practice of covering objects to protect them against dust – when instead the staff should perhaps have made more effort to protect the museum from becoming figuratively dusty.

The described rigidity of the museum professionals might be rooted in the moulding of museum professionalism. One could say that as the museum profession developed and people specialised, the self-awareness of the museum profession also grew. According to Ritva Palviainen, the Finnish museum field saw several far-reaching reforms in the 1970s and 1980s: a nationwide provincial museum system was created, museum policy programmes were drafted, the Museums Act (1146/1988) determining the qualifications of a museum for receiving state subsidies was finally passed, unions for museum workers were founded, and museology was included in the university teaching programme. The museum professionals were also tied by ICOM’s new Code of Professional Ethics, adopted in 1986, as well as the Finnish ethical guidelines for museum work, created in 1989 (Palviainen 2010:324–325, 330).

To emphasise their professional identity, the museum staff didn’t want their work to be associated with the small, privately-owned museums (named as such by their owners), which were not considered museums at all (Salminen 2011:50). In a guidebook of museology, published in 2001, the editors express what might have been the underlying fear of the professional museum field: If some museums are experienced as “dusty and unpleasant”, the same image will be generalised as a representation of the whole field, and the audience might have trouble separating

the scientific and fact-checked information the professional museums provide from the hotchpotch of private collections and home museums (Heinonen & Lahti 2001:216, 218–219). The dustiness of professional museums is thus not only related to competencies, but rather to over-stressing the competence and expert-knowledge of museum professionals. Paradoxically, the reforms, research and new working practices that once were innovative, later appeared as restrictive and unimaginative – a dusty way of thinking – and the good intentions of fighting against dust have made the museums “dusty”.

As Gary Fine and Tim Hallett have pointed out, in discourse dust can be used to create social order: dust stands for periphery and backwardness, and the “uncivilised” people are portrayed as dusty and dirty (Fine & Hallett 2002:11–12). Elizabeth Shove (2003:88) agrees that using labels such as “clean” or “dirty” when describing people, things or practices, often contributes to social classificatory systems like class, race, gender or age. As the material of this study concurs, *dustiness*, in the sense of backwardness and anti-progressive ways of thinking, is also an attribute that is outsourced to the *other*, and it can just as well be linked to the peripheral, rural heritage museums or bigger and professional museum institutions, depending on the interlocutor’s perspective.

LIGHT DUSTING OR PURGING?

Robert Willim (2006:55) points out that it is activity and movement that give rise to dust, and therefore it should perhaps be associated with speed and breeze rather than stagnation. Indeed, as a verb, *dust* or *dusting* means an activity where one removes dust from surfaces either by wiping, shaking or even beating the object.⁶ Michael Marder poetically describes,

that while dusting, we also touch the objects, exempting them “from the functions they are supposed to serve” which permits us to “get reacquainted with them [...] through another prism, in a different light”. Dusting removes the sediments that conceal the “real” object (Marder 2016:12, 14). Using dusting as an allegory thus means re-examining an object – and idea, thought or concept – and shaking off some of the prejudices and preconceptions that have accrued on it.

In museum discourse, dusting or removing dust are often used allegorically. The term is connected to reforms and introspection, and it signifies change. The premise is that museums are dusty – meaning dull, old-fashioned, and somehow backwards – but then they get injected with new ideas and new energy:

Years go by and we come to the 50s. Our family moves to Oulu. The museum has been renewed since our last visit, meaning 1943. It is still old-fashioned. Now begins the reforming. I am often over there to help. Dusts away from the glass cases, and everything else that a summer and weekend help can do. (Museo 408. 2008. Woman, born in 1935.)

The Finnish Museums Association also used dusting as a key element in their marketing campaign: “Museums are not dusty – ideas might be.”⁷ In 1986 the Association set up a campaign that was directly targeted at the political and economic decision-makers: ministers, members of the parliament, executives of significant companies, to name a few. The aim of the campaign was to change the public image: to “shake and dust the ossified perceptions”, “create the joy of re-discovering museums”, and make the targeted decision-makers commit to a more museum-positive attitude – from which museums and their resources would ultimately benefit.

The campaign material gave glimpses of contemporary museum work and the future collections, and also provided free entrance to all the museums involved in the campaign. Those who pledged their loyalty to museums also took part in a raffle with a possibility to win a trip to Barcelona. The campaign was produced by an advertising company *Creator Oy*, who also received the Finnish Marketing Association’s award for it (Pilve 1986:72–81; Leimu 1986:82; Kinanen 2010:80).

The campaign did not receive unanimously positive feedback. The press was horrified by the expenses of the campaign (200,000 Finnish marks, equalling roughly 63,000 euros) and claimed it a waste of the Museums Association’s low funds. In reality, approximately 60 museums contributed to the campaign and the advertising company worked free of charge. But the real problem was that museums were “selling out” (Leimu 1986:82–84). Some of the strong criticism came from inside the museum field, when the campaign was being planned:

Is it truly so that people don’t have any noble spiritual aspirations, goals or needs anymore. Where have the genuine and spontaneous, naturally growing hunger for culture and thirst for the reliable knowledge produced in museums disappeared. Do we really need to persuade and beg people and policymakers to become interested in these things with such commercial and sordid marketing means? (Pilve 1986:74.)

This explains why one of the members of the organizing board had a defensive note in his speech when reminiscing about the project:

It had to do with that, what I said about the development of the whole museum field in these decades, that museums became more outreaching and marketing was just part of that. I am not an

eager... [laughter] eager marketing man, but I think it's clear that if we're doing a respectable, good job, you must also make it visible. And I think this, this slack statement, that museums are dusty, that also needs some shaking, some dusting! [Laughing] [...] That's how it is, that these sort of [museum] weeks and campaigns are in order, and... They bring publicity, that... dustless museums need. (FMA: Matti Rossi)

The marketing campaign dusted museums inside and out. It pointed out that it was the views of the "wider audience" that needed dusting and updating. It also effectively changed and recreated museums by introducing new innovative practices – active marketing – to museum work, and thus produced "dustless museums". Indeed, in 1987 the Finnish Museums Association organised their first course on marketing for museum professionals (Kinanen 2010:88).

As Hanneleena Hieta (2010:52–56) discusses, the economic depression of the early 1990s in Finland generated pressure to cut state funding for cultural institutions, and consequently the museum field also adopted concepts like competitiveness and fiscal accountability in its discourse. The situation was not unique to Finland, and the commodification of "museum products" became in the 1980s and 90s a wide topic in international museum literature. (Harrison 2005:46). In this literature one can trace a change of attitude towards marketing. According to Ruth Rentschler, articles on museum marketing published in the 1970s and early 1980s, mainly covered "issues of educating visitors", or "raising staff awareness of the benefits of visitor studies", but since the mid-1990s an increasing number of articles discussed marketing as a strategy for obtaining new audiences (Rentschler 2007:15–16). Adopting marketing as part of museum work also indicated a change in understanding

what a museum is, and who it serves. The change was partially due to economic realities, but it was also encouraged by the emergence of *New Museology*, which meant shifting from "object-based" to "people-based" museums (Rentschler 2007:13).

There was plenty of resistance towards the new managerial practices which possibly symbolised greedy capitalism for some, and according to Marjatta Levanto, Finnish museums didn't start properly "branding" themselves before the turn of the millennium. Gradually the attitudes towards marketing have shifted "from condemning to doubtful, and from doubtful to participative" (Levanto 2010:106). It still took about a decade from the first museum marketing course before the first *marketing assistants* entered the museum field.⁸

Nonetheless, it seems that the idea of a dusty museum is difficult to disperse. It might be possible momentarily to shake off some of the prejudices people have about museums, but after a while they resurface. In 1986 the Finnish Museums Association managed to tackle the cliché at least partially through its campaign, but in 2007 the folklorist Mari Hatakka (2007:1) noted that in colloquial language *museum* often has a negative meaning, and it is used when the interlocutor wants to emphasise that something is "dusty, isolated, forgotten and belongs in the past". As Michael Marder (2016:15–16) aptly comments, dust will always keep accumulating, and dusting is a task that must be repeated regularly.

CONCLUSIONS

As an element of practices, dust can be elusive and play many roles. As the material studied in this paper shows, on the level of actions, museum dust is related to planning, maintaining and visiting exhibitions, and

creating an “authentic” or old-fashioned atmosphere. In these practices, dust can serve as a target – something that the action intends to remove – or even an active agent, that has a physical or mental effect on objects and people. However, when analysed from a cultural perspective and within the frame of Practice Theory, the actions are always tied to more abstract elements, like values and ideals. For example, maintaining a “dust-free” exhibition is linked to particular competencies, such as good organization skills, professional knowledge, and high morality.

Museum dust can be very tangible, but it is also an immaterial concept that has social significance. Pairing the words *dust* and *museum* – in *museum dust* or *dusty museum* – carries special meaning. It stands for conservative, strict and boring views of what a museum is. The concept of “dusty museum” is a discursive practice that contains “routinised mental activities” like shared forms of understanding and know-how (Reckwitz 2002:254–255). It is a practice that intersected both the interview and the questionnaire material analysed in this paper, and the discourses of museum professionals and visitors. Depending on the context, it can still have slightly different meanings. The use of the term reveals what sort of a museum idea the interlocutor is rooting for: strictly professional museums, or more freely defined, “live” local heritage museums. Through this discursive practice, dust is used to create social order and to “other” the “wrong” kind of museums (Fine & Hallett 2002:11–12).

Dusting the museum brand is a similar discursive practice, that stands on the premise that a museum is dusty, old-fashioned and needs to reform. The practice also has non-discursive implications: to get rid of the figurative museum dust, one needs to adopt

new museum practices, such as marketing. As the example of the Finnish Museums Association’s marketing campaign shows, there has been disagreement in the Finnish museum field about how much dusting one can do before one damages the object – the museum. On the other hand, the task of dusting is never finished (Marder 2016:15–16). To protect the public “perception of an exhibition, and of the institution” (Shah, Hunter, Adams, Bancroft & Blyth 2011:25), museums need to regularly attend to their dust – both tangible and intangible.

NOTES

1. The original language of the material is Finnish. All translations are by the author.
2. <http://museohistoria.museoliitto.fi>, accessed 10 October 2017. Some of the interviews listed in the database have been conducted before the museum history project.
3. In Finnish: Minun museomuistoni, full archival code: SKS KRA. Museo. KRAK. In this paper, the archival unit will be referred to as Museo.
4. <http://www.finlit.fi>, accessed 10 October 2017.
5. However, one can still study the role of dust in the human history (Russell 2000:xii).
6. In English language, dusting can also mean the opposite of that: sprinkling something with dust (Marder 2016:2).
7. In Finnish: Museot eivät ole pölyisiä. Ajatukset saattavat olla.
8. The job title first appeared in the museums’ annual reports 1995–2000 (Pettersson & Kinanen 2010:414).

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- Inkeri Hakamies, MA, Doctoral Candidate,
University of Helsinki
inkeri.hakamies@gmail.com
- European Ethnology*
P.O. Box 59
FI-00014 University of Helsinki
FINLAND
- <https://tuhat.helsinki.fi/portal/fi/person/ihakamie>