

FINLAND

ACADEMIC RESEARCH PROPOSAL

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The Art of Living: The Consequence of Everyday Aesthetics in Contemporary Art Theory

Aesthetics is a branch of philosophy centering on the nature of our responses to and judgments of sensory experiences. It deals primarily with the arts, beauty, and taste. In “traditional aesthetics,” aesthetic experience and aesthetic properties have been largely derived from considerations related to works of art. This narrow, art-oriented focus has fundamentally limited the scope of aesthetics. Aesthetics affect our lives on a daily basis; from the things we buy to the way we dress to the places we choose to live, many of our day-to-day decisions are based on aesthetic judgments or tastes which traditional aesthetics has ignored. During the last few decades, however, an emerging sub-discipline known as “Everyday Aesthetics” has sought—largely through the work of Finnish philosophers—to redress this oversight. The discipline of Everyday Aesthetics focuses on our sensory responses and interactions with everyday environments and objects as disparate as weather, food, sports, sex, lawns and gardens, or even consumer products. It aims to broaden the considerations for aesthetics, not presuming to dismiss experience simply because it is transient or mundane.

This proposal seeks to take the propositions and revelations of Everyday Aesthetics and consider their implications for the arts. What does an expanded definition of aesthetic experience mean for the arts? Is there a fundamental difference between experiencing a work of art and the aesthetics of everyday experiences, such as drinking a cup of tea? Artists themselves seem to blur these lines regularly—for instance, New York-based artist Rirkrit Tiravanija has cooked pad thai for gallery visitors, highlighting the communal and convivial experience of sharing a meal with others, while Andrea Fraser has offered sexual intercourse as art, and Tino Sehgal has offered constructed conversations that become a harrowing experience for audiences. How do these artists, who focus on our relationships to each other and are known as “relational artists,” contribute to the contemporary discourse on aesthetics? And, ultimately, how might the discipline of everyday aesthetics affect working artists?

I propose to survey the relationship between contemporary art and Everyday Aesthetics through joint research at the University of Helsinki Department of Aesthetics and Aalto University of Art and Design in Helsinki, Finland. At the University of Helsinki, I will attend PhD level lectures, seminars, and courses. Arto Haapala, a distinguished philosopher and Professor of Aesthetics at the Department of Philosophy, History, Culture and Art Studies, has agreed to be my affiliate. Haapala has invited me to participate in his Seminar for PhD students during the 2013-2014 academic year. This seminar will be a place to present perspectives and ideas, engage in discussion, and receive feedback and criticism. At Haapala's suggestion, I will also organize a reading group with PhD candidates which will explore the relationship between Everyday Aesthetics and the art of relational artists. Haapala, who has argued that the preoccupation of aesthetics with the arts has led to a widespread but erroneous assumption that the experience of art is the only form of aesthetic experience, is intimately involved in the developing field of Everyday Aesthetics, and has published extensively on art, aesthetics, and philosophy. He is uniquely positioned to advise me in this research.

The second trajectory of this project will center on contemporary art in Finland (especially in and around Helsinki) in order to examine the implications of Everyday Aesthetics for contemporary artists. Ossi Naukkarinen, a preeminent aesthetician, professor, and Vice Dean of Aalto University School of Arts, Design, and Architecture has invited me to work with the artists at Aalto University and has also agreed to be my affiliate. Naukkarinen has published extensively on the subject of Everyday Aesthetics and has recently organized an international conference on “Artification and its Impact on Art.” Utilizing the resources at Aalto University, I will attend lectures, panels, and seminars, such as Naukkarinen's Advanced Studies in Aesthetics and Philosophy of Art. But, I will also interview artists about their practices and concerns, attend art openings, and conduct studio visits with artists who seem to engage directly with the ordinary, the un-monumental, or the quotidian. Ultimately, I would like to explore the possibility of curating an art exhibition that explores how local Finnish artists have been influenced by Finland's unique dedication to Everyday Aesthetics.

Preparation for this project began two years ago when I was introduced to Everyday Aesthetics by the philosopher Yuriko Saito. Saito has argued for a normative approach to the moral potentiality of aesthetics by illustrating the powerful influence that seemingly simple and innocuous aesthetic judgments can have on the state of the world. I worked closely with Saito in her course on Everyday Aesthetics and expanded my inquiry with Graduate level courses, lectures, and reading groups in

aesthetics, art theory, and artification. In anticipation of the Fulbright, I will spend the 2012-2013 academic year as Saito's research assistant for her upcoming book, *Everyday Aesthetics and World-Making*, contracted to be published by Oxford University Press.

This project will provide a singular opportunity to critically engage with contemporary aesthetics in a culture that values the role of aesthetics in daily life. Finland is unique in its dedication to this field: government funding and an interest in applied aesthetics has led not only to the growth of advanced degree programs in the Philosophy of Aesthetics, but also to a burgeoning community of institutes, such as the International Institute for Applied Aesthetics, research organizations, such as the Finnish Society for Aesthetics, international conferences, such as the IIAA Summer Congresses, and collectives aimed at aesthetic research. This culture of professional engagement will nourish cross-cultural discussions about the value of our daily experiences and be instrumental to my ultimate goal: the pursuit of a doctorate in the philosophy of aesthetics. The project will culminate in a written thesis which I hope to publish in *IO*, a research journal published by the International Institute of Applied Aesthetics, on the value of Everyday Aesthetics to contemporary art; I believe that an expanded understanding of the nature of aesthetic experience, as proposed by *Everyday Aesthetics*, has far-reaching implications for artists—just as I believe artists' continued investigation into the overlooked, the simple, and the mundane is inherently *Everyday Aesthetics* in practice.