

Max Ryyänen

# TEACHING PORTFOLIO

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## INTRODUCTION

This is where I feel at home professionally. We have a break during a summer workshop for dancers, performance artists, film makers and critics in Cesis (Latvia, 2015). After teaching together with choreographer Lily Skove (L.A.), ballet professor Annemari Autere (Nice), and film maker Valerijs Olehno (Riga), intensive discussions pop up. This is where teaching goes flux.



I work as a Senior University Lecturer in Theory of Visual Culture at the Department of Art in Aalto University (Espoo) since 2006, but I started teaching in Universities January 2000.

I have lectured in **18 universities**, without forgetting a broad variety of private organizations/festivals (F.I.T., SPACE) in **9 countries** (80 courses, dozens of course visits). I am the supervisor of **87** finished/unfinished MA theses and **5** PhD theses.

I have good memories from e.g. **Lancaster University, Trondheim Art Academy, the Royal University College of Fine Arts Stockholm, the Academy of Fine Art and Design Bratislava, Riga Academy of Culture, the Academy of Art in Tallinn, the University of Turku, the University of Lapland, the Theatre Academy of Finland**, and festivals like **Exodos Ljubljana, Homo Alibi Riga, New Dance in a New Venue** and **New Baltic Dance Vilnius** (see list in the end of the document).

Currently I mostly teach in the program Visual Culture and Contemporary Art (<http://vicca.fi/>, 100 students from 30 countries), a program that I directed 3 years (2017-2019). In my school of ARTS of Aalto University (ranked 7<sup>th</sup> in QS for Art and Design Universities), I (have) also visit(ed; lectured) e.g. in fashion, art education, design and film.

I teach doctoral students since 2010 and I supervise MAs and doctoral candidates (my first doctoral student defended her work in 2018). I teach aesthetics, art theory, academic skills, film theory, art critique, kitsch and camp studies, political philosophy, Museum and Gallery Philosophy and philosophy of the body – but historically I have taught history of art and cultural semiotics too. Some courses are lecture-based, some workshops, but most of them are constructed around a theme.

For example in *Modes of Writing* (2018, <https://viccamodesofwriting.blogspot.com/>) we studied different ways of using text from rap music to recipes and body art. We aspire to get into grips with what writing could be outside of the academic and literary formats. We had a Skype session with poet and creative writing professor Mamta Sagar and her students at the Srishti College of Art in Bangalore India (see pic below from her workshop in Bangalore in 2017). We had two rap journalists (Särre (also being a producer) and Koko Hubara) visiting and talking about their sense of literature in hip hop culture. I did myself an experimental lecture by writing. Students both studied texts on writing and performed acts of writing.



On some courses the teaching needs to be more basic, of course – and not have I often had opportunities to work with so many visitors. On the Philosophy and Theory of Art I try to get students into thinking about the long history of theoretical thinking about the arts and the aesthetics, and to also realize that both new and old texts, both Western and Non-Western, academic and non-academic, provide differing ways of grabbing the problems. On this course I teach a wide variety of thinkers from Abhinavagupta, Al-Ghazzali, Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno to Susan Sontag, Gianni Vattimo and Celeste Olalquiaga.

When teaching professionals in workshops, the most important thing seems to be breaking the ice. For example, critics – I have taught e.g. critics of the Guardian and the main newspapers of Prague, Riga, Vilnius, Bratislava and Berlin – are often very cynical, which is easy to understand if they e.g. see and write about 80 exhibitions or 60 performances every year. I have been surprising the participants e.g. by bringing in the artist himself/herself to the sessions where we read critiques of his/her work, a ‘trap’ which has forced some too routine-based authors to take a new dialogical stance. The most memorable of these sessions was when the performer and Pina Bausch choreographer Raimund Hughe suddenly popped up on our course to read the critiques written about his solo work in a workshop I gave at the Exodos Theatre Festival in Ljubljana in 2008. Hughe had been a critic himself and he analyzed the critiques in a very engaged manner and students had to explain what they had written (including some harsh remarks about Hughe’s work). Hughe himself said he enjoyed this, and I have since used this in my critique teaching.

In the beginning, every year, with a new group of people who's main interest is not theory, I feel that it is important to make theory somehow easy to approach. I call the first lectures of the year 'geisha lectures'. I try to softly and as seductively as possible show what philosophy/aesthetics/theory are about, and why one could have benefits from studying them.

New forms of teaching are always illuminative, and they help students to see that doing theory can be thought of as an art too. I have been giving short lectures which are the exact length of the short films that I have showed (e.g. 4 minutes 13 seconds) and I have lectured by writing with a computer (big size text on the wall).

## **1 TEACHING EXPERIENCE (INCLUDING SUPERVISION)**

I started my teaching career by being twice the tutor in aesthetics during my studies (1996, 1997). In 1997-1998 I taught Swedish at Kerava Language School. I was surprised about the strength of the 'aura of the teacher', the way people listened and copied my ways of talking, but all and all teaching languages was a bit different from what I do now, and I never really felt at home with it.

This was to change when I started teaching scholarly matters. January 2000 I taught my first university course, as a teacher per hours at Helsinki University. It was a course in aesthetics, more exactly a course in the aesthetics of popular culture. There were no right answers anymore, but there were arguments and theories we could discuss.

After teaching per hours for several years, I received a teaching position as a lecturer in February 2006, at the Department of Art and Media at the University of Art and Design Helsinki (later Aalto ARTS) – and my job was made permanent in 2009.

As a **supervisor** of **MA theses**, which I have done for Fashion (2), Art Education (2), Visual Culture (42), New Media (1) and ViCCA (Visual Culture, Curating and Contemporary Art, 40) in Aalto University, and Photography in Bratislava Academy of Art and Design, (all and all 11 ongoing, 76 finished) and **Doctoral Dissertations** for Aalto University and University of Salamanca (5 ongoing, 1 finished: Henriikka Huunan-Seppälä), I have always been of the breed that becomes engaged like an executive producer of a rap record. I often take part intensively, read new things myself and I enjoy the dialogue.

When I give grades, I give the students the matrix I use for the assessment, to make it more transparent. E.g. in a 0-5 point assessment I have often used the following (simplified here): 1 point for sending me an essay (right length) that makes sense, 1 for including legitimate thinkers/facts in the text, 1 for a good analysis and use of sources of knowledge, 1 for a good structure, and 1 for 'je ne sais qua', for just being good however hard that is to explain in words. I state clearly that it is good to attend the lectures for a better understanding of me and the traditions I represent so that the student would get a glimpse of the enigmatic issue 'what is really good work'. I have noticed that students like dogmas. This is why I never give extra time for submitting essays for courses. I always

make this clear in the beginning of the course, and I have noticed that I still get as many in the end – so I save their Christmas and summer holidays by not accepting late contributions.

Assessing MA theses is hard work in this business, but it is a bit easier – as the work is more profound and rich in content than an essay for a course, and because the student really has to dig up knowledge and to work out something on his/her own. I have assessed theses for Visual Culture (5), Design (1), Art Education (5), Fashion (2), Media (2) and ViCCA (Visual Culture, Curating, and Contemporary Art, 12) in Aalto University, and for Aesthetics in Helsinki University (2), and Photography in the Bratislava Academy of Art and Design (1), all and all 25.

I have been on the **board of 4 PhD theses defenses**:

1. Virpi Kaukio, Environmental Aesthetics, University of Eastern Finland, pre-evaluator and opponent 2013
2. Susanne Ylönen, Art Education, University of Jyväskylä, pre-evaluator and opponent 2014
3. Sini Mononen, Musicology, University of Turku, pre-evaluator 2018
4. Mari Vergara, Art History, University of Complutense Madrid, pre-evaluator and opponent (committee 2019)

My main goal in these rituals has been to leave a beautiful memory, in the sense exclaimed by the Stoics, later reawakened by Michel Foucault. Academic rituals are intense and focused dialogues, where the candidate is tested, but in the end embraced with the perennial tradition.

## **2 DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHING, EXPERIENCE IN COURSE AND CURRICULUM**

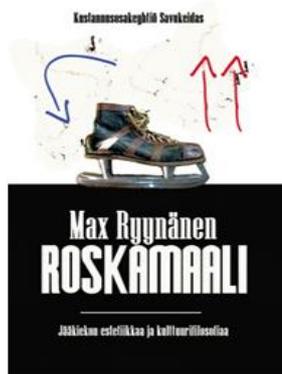
I have taken part in building two MA programs for Aalto ARTS, “Visual Culture”, which was active from 2006 to 2014, and “Visual Culture and Contemporary Art” (2014-) – I was a member of the planning committees – so I have experience and knowledge on program building (and the incredible amount of time it takes). I sat in the educational board of the University of Art and Design Helsinki from 2006 to 2009.

I am not an active user of technology when I teach, but more of a Socratic teacher. I like to have contact with my students, and I like to be present – but later on I often add facts, hints on good literature and other comments to course blogs that I have in the internet. The blogs are what I use for my teaching really a lot, and the students find all the materials there. For me the blog is like a manuscript and an archive, and on most theme courses I feel that the outcome should be a pedagogical art work, a work which lingers into the topic and the methodologies, and where the whole is more than its particles. Year after year I keep updating the blogs, until it is time for a new concept. This is my way of developing my own courses. See my ongoing Philosophy and Theory of Art course: <https://poafpca.blogspot.com/>

## **3 TEACHING MATERIALS**

I have grown uncomfortable with the introduction book industry. Introduction books often give you the idea that you could package theoretical thinking somewhat easily, but as art, good theoretical thinking is too complex for that. You need to study it in detail, and as a whole, to really get it, so in some sense the intros are not teaching the right way (I think the academy has here become a bit like Reader's Digest). Even on intro courses I encourage students to read original texts. Afterwards they are usually very happy about this.

On the other hand, I have found it nice to write essayistically so that everyone could easily approach the study. One could say that I have been hiding pedagogical attitudes and teaching materials in easy-to-grab products. In Roskamaali ("Garbage Goal", Savukeidas 2012, so far only in Finnish, but I am working on a translation) I analyzed ice hockey from the point of view of aesthetics and art theory. I was happy that I got response from hockey journalists and hockey players on issues that actually were classical problems of aesthetics – from harmony to the appreciation of movement, but originally I meant it to be a pedagogical Trojan horse. (See pic below.)



#### **4 TEACHING PHILOSOPHY**

I don't have any systematic beliefs or ideas about what teaching should be. Like art, I think teaching is an open concept. You could maybe also call it site-specific or case sensitive: it has to find new ways of working in different places, in different times, and different people.

#### **5 PEDAGOGICAL EDUCATION**

2001 Intensive pedagogical course at Tartu University (Nordplus, 3 cr).

- 2005-2007 Taikopeda (25 cr), a program meant for teachers of art schools (Sibelius Academy, Theatre Academy, The University of Art and Design Helsinki and the Academy of Fine Art Helsinki).
- 2012-2015 Pedagogical studies for Aalto ARTS (60 cr). Legitimate Teacher according to Finnish law (Opettajapätevyys), University of Tampere.

(All an all I have 88 credits of pedagogical studies.)

## **6 EXPERIENCE OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP**

2006-2009 Head of the MA programme Visual Culture at the University of Art and Design Helsinki

2017- Head of the MA programme Visual Culture, Curating, and Contemporary Art (Aalto)

2010 Vice Head of the Department of Art and Media

Most theorists work course by course (per hours) or apply for one or two year funding (in Finland the job situation is very arbitrary, and often even celebrated scholars have 1-3 years deals on research funding), but I have been lucky. I have had a steady job (I started 2006 and became tenured late 2009) for 14 years.

I also spent my three first years of teaching as the **head of the MA programme** (2006-2009) for **visual culture** in the University of Art and Design Helsinki, continuing then for a year and a half as the professor deputy and 18 months as the **vice director of the whole department** (2010-2011).

2017-2019 I was again the **head of Visual Culture and Contemporary Art MA program** (vicca.fi). Having 130 students aboard and being the supervisor for 6 people working here was quite a challenge, and there was a lot of administration (when you survive Finnish university admin, you survive anywhere), but it is also very rewarding. One can really have an impact, if one works successfully.

The Finnish university system is very tough administratively speaking and it is typical that people cannot produce much research as their administrative duties are too heavy. I have been happy to realize that I am able to read, write and do things although I have or have had a lot of administration.

## 7 OTHER TEACHING MERITS

Thinking about other teaching merits, my most important output might be my written reflections of teaching. My main interest here has been to discuss the role of theory teaching in art programmes and debating the role of pedagogy in the art field. The four texts I have written (some co-written, see below) have helped me to understand what I am doing.

“Teaching as a Work of Art.” With Taina Rajanti and Pia Euro. In Teija Löytönen (ed). *Synnyt/Births* (Finnish Journal for Art Education) 2015: 2. 41-61.

Art and Education - or the dark side of pedagogy. A dialogue. With Christiana Galanopoulou. *Synnyt/Origins. Finnish Studies on Art*. 2011 September. 1-16.

“Lopputyön teoreettisen osan ohjaamisen erityisongelmia taideyliopistoissa.” [Problems in Supervising Theoretical MA Theses in Art Universities.] *Synnyt* 2007: 2. 54-61.

”Kättilö kasvattajana ja kasvatettavana. Teorian opettamisesta taiteilijoille.” [The Midwife as an Educator – and Someone Being Educated.] *Synnyt. Taidekasvatuksen tiedonala* 2006: 4. 34-40.

Currently I am working on text about supervision, which I presented in the Teaching Aesthetics conference in Presov (Slovakia) November 2019. I believe the article could be ready maybe late 2020.

## LIST OF WORKSHOPS, COURSES AT UNIVERSITIES AND VISITS ON COURSES

### Doctoral Studies

Forthcoming 2020	<b>Aalto University</b> , <u>Nobrow</u> , reading seminar on classics of high and low
2019	<b>Aalto University</b> , <u>Contemporary Art Research</u> (with Kevin Tavin and Mira Kallio-Tavin)
2018	<b>Aalto University</b> , <u>Philosophy of Art for Post-Contemporary Artists</u>
2017	<b>Aalto University</b> , <u>Philosophy of Art for Post-Contemporary Artists</u>

- 2016 **Aalto University**, Philosophy of Art for Post-Contemporary Artists
- 2016 **Aalto University**, Authorship and Agency
- 2016 **Aalto University**, Experimental Theory: Scholart (with Taina Rajanti)
- 2015 **Aalto University**, Authorship and Agency (with Harri Laakso)
- 2011 **Aalto University**, Doctoral Thesis Seminar (where students present their work)
- 2010 **Aalto University**, Doctoral Thesis Seminar (where students present their work)

**MA Studies (whole courses underlined, visiting lectures on courses in cursive)**

- Forthcoming **Estonian Academy of Art (Tallinn, Estonia)**, Somaesthetics for Artists, January 2020
- Aalto University**, Authorship and Agency
- Aalto University, Fashion Department MA program: Kitsch and Fashion*
- 2019 **Estonian Academy of Art (Tallinn, Estonia)**, Heretical Introduction to Visual Culture
- University of Helsinki, 12.11.2019, Visiting Lecture on the course Boundaries of Aesthetics, Aesthetics (Humanistic Faculty), Indian Medieval Aesthetics: The Casa of Rasa Theory*
- Aalto University**, Philosophy and Theory of Art
- Aalto University**, Thesis Seminar
- Aalto University**, Authorship and Agency
- 2018 **Burtnieki (Latvia), LAUKKU**, visiting sessions on visual culture studies for social workers and their clients in an experimental societal event curated by Inta Balode
- Estonian Academy of Art**, A Heretical Introduction to Visual Culture
- Aalto University, one day at the course Introduction to Visual Culture, Curating and Contemporary Art*

**Aalto University, Modes of Writing**

**Aalto University, Philosophy and Theory of Art**

*Aalto University, one day on Introduction to Visual Culture and Contemporary Art*

**Aalto University, Positions, on political philosophy**

**Aalto University, Authorship and Agency**

2017

**Latvian Academy of Culture, Feb 4-6, Authorship and Agency**  
(Erasmus)

**Aalto University, Philosophy of Art for Post-Contemporary Artists**

*Aalto University, one day at the course Introduction to Visual Culture and Contemporary Art*

**Aalto University, Authorship and Agency**

**Aalto University, Thesis Seminar**

2016

**Aalto University, Authorship and Agency**

**Aalto University, Thesis Seminar**

**Aalto University, Philosophy of Art for Post-Contemporary Artists**

**Aalto University, Scholart (Experimental Theory)**

**Aalto University, Lectures and Speeches (Workshop)**

*Aalto University, one day at the course Introduction to Visual Culture and Contemporary Art*

2015

**New Dance in a New Venue 2015 at Saldus (Latvia). Teaching dance writing together with Annemari Autere, Elina Gatjukevica, Luciana Achiugar, Moa Sahlin and Sesselja Magnusdottir. Producer: Inta Balode. August 2015.**

**Aalto University, Authorship and Agency**

*Helsinki University, Aesthetics, Visiting lecture: The Boundaries of Aesthetics study group at Helsinki University (4 hrs) on the future of the aesthetics of popular culture*

*Aalto University, one day at the course Introduction to Visual Culture and Contemporary Art*

**Aalto University, Authorship and Agency**

**Aalto University, Introduction to Aesthetics and Cultural Philosophy**

**2014**

**New Dance in a New Venue at Cesis (Latvia): One week lab for dance professionals** with Lily Skove, Valerijs Olehno and Annemari Autere for Writing Movement (org.: Inta Balode): philosophy of the body/mind, somaesthetics and the theme machine/animal. October.

**University of Lapland at Rovaniemi (Finland):** a one week course for art students on Sound, Light and Philosophy with Antti Ikonen. February.

*Aalto University, one day at the course Introduction to Visual Culture and Contemporary Art*

*Art University Helsinki, Lighting, Aesthetics*

**Aalto University, Introduction to Aesthetics and Cultural Philosophy**

**Aalto University, Thesis Seminar (ViCCA)**

**Aalto University, Thesis Seminar (Visual Culture)**

**2013**

**New Dance in a New Venue at Rezekne (Latvia): Lab for critics & producers** with Kristina Sörensen, Annemari Autere, Ingrida Gerb and Olga Zitluhina for Writing Movement. Org.: Inta Balode. Somaesthetics and philosophy of regionality. August.

*Aalto University, one day at the course Introduction to Visual Culture*

**Aalto University, Light, Sound and Philosophy** (with Antti Ikonen and Markku Uimonen)

**Aalto University, Taidekritiikki (Art Critique)**

**Aalto University, Johdatus estetiikkaan ja kulttuurifilosofiaan (Introduction to Aesthetics and Cultural Philosophy)**

**2012**

**Aalto University, Museo- ja festivaalifilosofia (Museum and Festival Philosophy)**

*Aalto University, One day visit on the course Introduction to Visual Culture*

**Aalto University, Academic Writing**

**Aalto University, Johdatus estetiikkaan ja kulttuurifilosofiaan (Introduction to Aesthetics and Cultural Philosophy)**

- Aalto University**, Taidekritiikki (Art Critique)
- 2011 ***Homo Alibi Theatre Festival at Riga Latvia / SPACE, Programmers on the Move: Visiting lecture at the New Latvian Theatre Institute (org.: Laura Stasane).***
- Art Academy Trondheim Norway: Visual Arts & Architecture: urban studies & contemporary art. One day visit.***
- Academy of Art and Design at Bratislava Slovakia: visiting lecture on a Course on Art Theory (Jozef Kovalcik).***
- Aalto University**, Film, Art, Terrorism (Experimental Workshop)
- Aalto University**, Thesis Seminar (Visual Culture)
- Aalto University**, Academic Writing
- Aalto University, One day visit on the course Introduction to Visual Culture***
- Aalto University**, Johdatus estetiikkaan ja kulttuurifilosofiaan (Introduction to Aesthetics and Cultural Philosophy)
- 2010 **Aalto University**, Thesis Seminar (Visual Culture)
- Aalto University**, Academic Writing
- Aalto University**, Johdatus estetiikkaan ja kulttuurifilosofiaan (Introduction to Aesthetics and Cultural Philosophy)
- Aalto University, One day visit on the course Introduction to Visual Culture***
- 2009 **Aalto University**, Johdatus estetiikkaan ja kulttuurifilosofiaan (Introduction to Aesthetics and Cultural Philosophy)
- Aalto University, One day visit on the course Introduction to Visual Culture***
- Aalto University**, Academic Writing
- 2008 **Exodos Theater Festival at Ljubljana Slovenia:** Festivals in Transition / Mobile Lab: Theme of the writing LAB: gonzo journalism. Guests: Rok Vevar & Raimund Hoghe.
- Homo Alibi Theater Festival at Riga Latvia:** Festivals in Transition / Mobile Lab: Theme of writing LAB: interpretation. Guest: Penny Francis.

**University of Helsinki:** Aesthetics / Semiotics: Kitsch & Camp  
(Together with Susanna Välimäki).

*Theater Academy of Finland: Degree Program in Lighting: visiting lecture (day) on aesthetics and light art.*

*Helsinki School of Economics: Language and Culture: lecture on art.*

**Aalto University,** Johdatus estetiikkaan ja kulttuurifilosofiaan  
(Introduction to Aesthetics and Cultural Philosophy)

**Aalto University,** Thesis Seminar (Visual Culture)

**Aalto University,** Academic Writing

2007

*Royal University College of Fine Arts at Stockholm: Contemporary Art: lecture on semiotics of art.*

**Open University of Helsinki:** Aesthetics / Semiotics: Aesthetics and Semiotics of Media

*Theater Academy: Degree Program in Lighting: visiting lecture (day) on aesthetics and light art.*

*University of Art and Design Helsinki: Department of Film: lecture on film and urban studies.*

*Helsinki School of Economics: Language and Culture: lecture on art.*

**Aalto University,** Johdatus estetiikkaan ja kulttuurifilosofiaan  
(Introduction to Aesthetics and Cultural Philosophy)

**Aalto University,** Thesis Seminar (Visual Culture)

**Aalto University,** Academic Writing

*Design Museum Helsinki, Educating Curators, one day visit*

2006

**Aalto University,** Johdatus estetiikkaan ja kulttuurifilosofiaan  
(Introduction to Aesthetics and Cultural Philosophy)

**Aalto University,** Thesis Seminar (Visual Culture)

**Aalto University,** Academic Writing

**Aalto University,** Environmental Aesthetics

**Open University of Helsinki:** Aesthetics / Semiotics: Aesthetics and Semiotics of Media.

*Theater Academy: Stage Design: visiting lecture (day) on aesthetics and light art.*

*University of Art and Design Helsinki: Textile Design: lecture on kitsch.*

*Helsinki School of Economics: Language and Culture: lecture on art.*

*University of Turku: Idea History: lecture on urban aesthetics.*

- 2005 **University of Art and Design Helsinki**, Visual Culture Department, Aesthetics and Cultural Philosophy
- 2004 **University of Art and Design Helsinki**: Environmental MA program: Entertainment Environments
- University of Art and Design Helsinki**: Department of Visual Culture: Introduction to Aesthetics
- University of Helsinki**, Aesthetics, Art Critique
- 2003 **University of Helsinki**: Aesthetics: Art Critique
- University of Lancaster UK**: Philosophy: Aesthetics of Pop Art (teaching exchange).
- 2002 **University of Art and Design Helsinki**: Art Education: Aesthetics and Semiotics of Popular Culture
- University of Helsinki**, Aesthetics, Art Critique
- Open University of Helsinki**: Semiotics: Semiotics of MTV
- 2001 **University of Helsinki**: Aesthetics: Art Critique
- Open University of Helsinki**: Aesthetics: Aesthetics of Kitsch
- 2000 **Helsinki Open University**, Semiotics: semiotics of popular culture
- University of Helsinki**: Aesthetics: Introduction to the Aesthetics of Popular Culture and Media

### **BA Level Teaching**

- 2018 *Aalto University, 2 day visit on the course Beer and Sausage (by Harri Laakso) at UWAS*

- 2008 *Satakunta University of Applied Sciences, The Modern System of Art*
- 2007 *Satakunta University of Applied Sciences, The Modern System of Art*
- 2006 *Satakunta University of Applied Sciences, The Modern System of Art*
- 2005 *Metropolia, Helsinki University of Applied Sciences, one day visit on cultural semiotics*
- 2004 **Tampere University of Applied Sciences, Aesthetics**
- Kuopio University of Applied Sciences, Philosophy of Communication**
- 2003 **Kuopio University of Applied Sciences, Aesthetics**
- Turku University of Applied Sciences, Art History**