

ACTA

Pauliina Rautio

WRITING ABOUT EVERYDAY
BEAUTY IN A NORTHERN
VILLAGE

AN ARGUMENT FOR DIVERSITY
OF HABITABLE PLACES

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PAULIINA RAUTIO

**WRITING ABOUT EVERYDAY
BEAUTY IN A NORTHERN VILLAGE**

An argument for diversity of habitable places

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Abstract

The two rhetorical approaches to Finnish Lapland are the mythical and the miserable produced in the realms of tourism and politics respectively. The locals comply with neither. In this research the notion of beauty is used in seeking to understand how life is perceived as good-enough by particular villagers of a remote northern village. The scope of this research is novel theoretically and methodologically. The combination of everyday life aesthetics and education outside of institutional art education is rare and the method of data collection, collective correspondence, is created for the purposes of this research. Education is approached in this research as our perpetual growing in everyday life. Education and aesthetics receive support from sociology and human geography as well as environmental ethics.

The theoretical frame leans on Ludwig Wittgenstein's notions of language use: language is woven into the actions of ordinary life, used not only to describe but to act on and transform the world. The objectives of this research in brief are to 1) complement art-centered definitions of the notion of beauty, 2) argue for the significance of diversity of habitable places, and 3) to contribute positively to the prevailing negative research rhetoric on life in northern Finnish villages. These objectives are tackled with research tasks unfolding as descriptive, interpretative and methodological respectively: 1) of what kind is perceived beauty in everyday life led in a small northern village? 2) What is the significance of considering beauty in everyday life? 3) What kind of data does correspondence yield on perceived beauty?

There are four women participating in this research. They exchanged letters on the topic of everyday beauty once a month for a year. Together they comprise a group that varies in ages, education, employment, family structures and the length of stay in the village. What they share is a view of their home village as a good-enough place to live in. The main data consists of 44 letters supplemented by 10 interviews.

The letters have been read as one correspondence and as four individual sets of letters. Recurring themes, the temporal and spatial evolving of them as well as the performative aspects of writing have been addressed. Beauty has been found to reside in an iterative linguistic process rather than fixed in objects or even themes. Beauty articulates condensations of significant relations the perceiving individual holds in her life. As such *beauty in everyday life is relational, active and pertains to steering of one's life.*

The ability to relate to the environment in which you live in a personally meaningful and creative way is found to be facilitated by an environment of diversity. Rather than keeping the rural North habited I argue for ensuring that it is *habitable* for those who wish to live there. This means realizing that people craft good-enough lives in different ways relative to their everyday life environments.

Keywords: aesthetics, beautiful, environment, everyday life, language, Lapland, letter writing

Rautio, Pauliina, Kauniin kirjoittamista pohjoisen pienkylän arjessa. Argumentti elinympäristöjen monimuotoisuuden puolesta

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Tiivistelmä

Lapista puhutaan kahdella tavalla, joista kumpikaan ei tavoita täysin lappilaisten itsensä arkikokemusta: Lappia värittää paikkana joko myyttisyys tai kurjuus. Näitä kahta kuvaa ylläpitävät pääasiassa turismi ja politiikka. Tässä tutkimuksessa käytetään ilmausta "kaunis" yritettäessä ymmärtää elämää pohjoisessa pienkylässä riittävän hyväksi koettuna. Tutkimus on sekä teoreettisesti että metodologisesti monitieteinen ja uutta luova. Arjen estetiikan ja kasvatustieteen yhdistäminen taidekasvatuksen sisältöalueen ulkopuolella on harvinaista. Tutkimuksessa on käytetty aineistonkeruun menetelmänä kirjeenvaihtoa, ja erityisesti sen kollektiivista muotoa, joka on kehitetty tätä tutkimusta varten. Tutkimuksessa tarkastellaan kasvatustieteen avulla arkeen kietoutuvaa kasvua ihmisenä. Sosiologia, kulttuurimaantiede ja ympäristöetiikka täydentävät kasvatustiedettä ja estetiikkaa.

Tutkimuksen teoreettinen viitekehys nojaa Ludwig Wittgensteinin huomioihin kielen käytöstä arjessa. Kieli on kietoutunut arjen toimintoihin ja on käytössä paitsi maailman kuvaamisessa myös sen muuttamisessa. Tutkimuksen tavoitteet ovat lyhyesti: 1) laajentaa "kauniin" taidemaailmaan nojautuvaa määrittelyä, 2) argumentoida ihmisen elinympäristöjen monimuotoisuuden puolesta sekä 3) täydentää lähtökohtaisesti positiivisella tutkimusotteella pohjoisen pienkylien elämästä tuotettua pääosin negatiivista tutkimusretoriikkaa.

Tavoitteita lähestytään kolmella tutkimustehtävällä, jotka jakaantuvat kuvailevaksi, tulkinnalliseksi ja metodologiseksi. Tutkimustehtävät ovat: 1) minkälaista on kaunis pohjoisen pienkylän arjessa? 2) Mitä merkitystä on kauniin pohtimisella arjessa? 3) Minkälaista aineistoa kirjeenvaihto tuottaa kauneudesta?

Tutkimukseen on osallistunut neljä naista. Jokainen heistä on kirjoittanut kirjeitä kauneudesta arjessaan ja vaihtanut kirjeitä kerran kuussa vuoden ajan. Naisten iät, koulutustaustat, työllisyys-tilanteet, perherakenteet sekä kylässä asuttu aika vaihtelevat. Heitä yhdistää näkemys kotikylästään riittävän hyvänä asuinpaikkana. Tutkimuksen pääasiallinen aineisto koostuu 44 kirjeestä, joita täydentää kymmenen haastattelua.

Kirjeaineisto on luettu sekä yhtenä kirjeenvaihtona että neljänä osana, kunkin osallistujan kirjeet erikseen. Kirjeistä on tavoiteltu toistuvia teemoja ja näiden ajallista ja tilallista muotoutumista. Lisäksi kirjoituksia on pohdittu harkittuina esityksinä. Kaunis on todettu jatkuvaksi itseään korjaavaksi kielelliseksi prosessiksi sen sijaan, että se olisi paikantunut kiinteästi esineisiin, asioihin tai edes teemoihin. Arjen kaunis kiinnittyy kunkin elämässä merkityksellisiin suhteisiin. Kielellisenä prosessina kaunis ilmentää aktiivista ja luovaa toimijuutta ja liittyy elämän ohjailemiseen.

Monimuotoisuus tukee kykyä muodostaa ja tiedostaa merkityksellisiä ja luovia suhteita elinympäristöön. Sen sijaan, että tutkimuksessa argumentoitaisiin pohjoisten kylien asuttamisen puolesta tutkimus esittää että pienkylien asuttavuus tulisi turvata sellaisille jotka haluavat asua kylissä. Tämä edellyttää ymmärrystä siitä, että ihmiset tekevät elämästään riittävän hyvää laadullisesti eri tavoilla erilaisissa ympäristöissä.

Asiasanat: arki, estetiikka, kaunis, kieli, Lappi, ympäristö

*Dedicated to / Omistettu
Lauralle, Erjalle, Seijalle ja Kaarinalle*

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Leena did confess to making a phone call to Professor Elina Lahelma, the supervisor of my Master's thesis at the University of Helsinki, to find out who this young woman was who insisted on researching beauty. My heartfelt thanks go also to Elina, for inspiring teaching and guidance during my studies in Helsinki. Further back in the day there was David Company, a lecturer of the then Surrey Institute of Art & Design University College (UK), who supervised my Bachelor's dissertation and sparked up a desire in me to continue research. And way back, Tapani Kemi, my Finnish teacher in high-school, deserves thanks for making language such an enchanting phenomena in my world.

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There is one person, a peer in so many ways – a PhD student, a mother, a wife of a husband who occasionally disappears to the woods, a young woman ready to take on the world but not quite knowing how to go about it – without whose insightful comments and priceless peer-support during shared coffee breaks I doubt I would have managed as well. Thank you Maija!

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List of original articles

This thesis is based on the following articles, referred to in the text by their Roman numerals. Permissions for reprinting have been granted by the copyright holders.

- I Rautio, P. (2009). Finding the place of everyday beauty. Correspondence as a method of data collection. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 8(2).
- II Rautio, P. (2010). Beauty in the Context of Particular Lives. *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 44(4).
- III Rautio, P. (2009). On hanging laundry. The place of beauty in managing everyday life. *Contemporary Aesthetics* 7(9).
- IV Rautio, P. (Manuscript). Writing About Everyday Beauty. Anthropomorphism and Distancing in Relating to Environment. *Environmental Communication: Journal of Nature and Culture* X(X).

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1 Introduction

1.1 Prologue

Here, it feels as though time slows down, nature strips people of any inhibitions, the ancient fells touch the heart and forgotten tales are brought back to life. It is here that people who appreciate authenticity, nature, peace and experiences meet. It is here that they search for themselves, their inner self and their boundaries. This is where Lapland begins—the small human meets the great nature, and perhaps someone else. (Lakelapland.fi 2010.)

Many municipalities of Lapland have come to the end of their independent existence. [...] In Lapland, among others in Pelkosenniemi, Utsjoki and Enontekiö, the sources of new loans run dry and the policymakers give up. The municipalities are left with small and ageing population, whose services are forced on the state to take care of if the border areas are to remain habited. (Vainio 2007.)

The two rhetorical approaches to Finnish Lapland are the mystical and the miserable produced in the realms of tourism and politics respectively. The locals comply with neither and find themselves justifying their choice of staying instead of leaving. This research grew out of a desire to understand small Lappish villages as scenes of everyday lives rather than scenes of tourism or national politics and it aims to produce rhetoric from the viewpoint of particular individuals who find their lives worth living in a remote northern village. Beyond marketing agendas and calculations of national economics, there is Laura, a villager from Suvanto, walking along a road of a nearby town:

I'm walking in town along the School road towards the library. The sun shines brightly, wind sweeps around and water dribbles from gutters. Two elderly women on kick sleds come downhill, in the middle of the road. The rounder granny wears a bright yellow quilted jacket, the trimmer one's jacket is red. The grannies slide down the gentle slope standing, feet on the sled runners, faces glowing in the sun. It is warm, the sun shines, the sled glides and life and the grannies are smiling. Beautiful.

—Laura, a participant of this research, March letter

There are two underdogs this research aims to side with. The first is remote northern villages as places of dwelling. The second is beauty. Both as a concept and as an everyday practice, considering beauty has suffered from a lack of credibility. Within aesthetics, the concept of beauty has remained debated and has often been rendered as trivial against the more profound “sublime” (e.g., Scarry 2006). In educational theory as well as pedagogical practice, beauty as a concept and aesthetic sensibility as a skill have been marginalized to art education – a subject area continually diminishing in curricula nationwide – if even there at all (Winston 2008, 2006).

In this research I use beauty, a positive and subjective value judgment, to highlight the desirable elements of the lives led in remote northern villages. In turn, I use these everyday-life accounts to highlight the educational value of the concept of beauty as well as the significance of approaching it as something perceived by particular individuals. The combining of these two underdogs is at the theoretical and methodological core of this research, resulting also in a multidisciplinary and methodologically novel approach embracing, among others, aesthetics in addition to education.

The phenomenon of remote areas declining in services and population is known in other Western countries as well (e.g., Corbett 2008, Markey *et al.* 2008, Pow 2009). Sometimes, the areas in question are only relatively remote. However, the phenomenon is still similar: the people and politics in the so-called center do not follow the same logic of meaning-making as do those in remote areas. They do not live by the same quality of life standards. Political geographer Mustafa Dikeç (2007, 2009), for instance, talks about the notion of the French *banlieues* or suburbs in a manner similar to the way I view the predicament of remote Northern villages in Finland. He traces the changing image and concept – both in public and political rhetoric – of French banlieues from the late 1970s to the mid-1990s as shifting from neutral to negative. This trend has been enforced, if not totally created, by what Dikeç calls “state statements”: maps, statistics, official reports, discourses and the like.

On an international scale, the Finnish Lapland is exceptionally challenging both for the research and development of it: it is the most remote and sparsely populated area in the EU (Muilu 2010). The State’s comments regarding the northern and eastern regions of Finland portray these areas as dark places for welfare. National statistical research calculates regional difficulties with indicators that measure, for instance, rates of hospitalization due to mental illnesses, diagnosed cases of depression or the percentage of unemployment or

substance abuse in an area. Lapland and eastern Finland abound in these numbers (e.g., Gissler *et al.* 2004, see also Karvonen 2007, Karvonen & Rahkonen 2004.)

While national statistical welfare research is undoubtedly called for and its limitations are being recognised and discussed, the differentiation between welfare and wellbeing, between standards of living and quality of living (e.g., Naess 1989: 80–86, Nussbaum & Sen 1993) still remains to be forcefully stated. Qualitative research on wellbeing and quality of life in Lapland is scarce. As a result, villages of Lapland as places to live in suffer from stereotypes enforced by the prevalence of statistical data and the absence of qualitative accounts. This is beginning to turn into a vicious circle, as stereotypes tend to be strengthened more easily than they are disproved (Jukarainen & Tuhkanen 2004, Karvonen & Rahkonen 2004, Lähteenmaa 2006, Malmsten 2004.)

It is not only negative stereotypes but positive ones as well that can stigmatise. John Horton (2008) discusses the producing of Postman Pat, a character from a BBC children's program, as reinforcing the notion of an English rural idyll based on culturally and ideologically limited stereotypes. This idea of seemingly light-hearted popular imagery having a marked effect on people who are subjected to live in a stigmatised – whether as idyllic or miserable – place is well rehearsed in rural studies (e.g., Horton 2008, Hubbard 2005, see also Halfacree 1996, Karvonen 2000, Sibley 2003). Be it then negative or positive affirmations of what life is like in the remote North, these ideas bear on the people who do reside there.

Anne K. Ollila (2004) has studied young people's expectations of their future in Lapland. On the one hand, Lapland is portrayed by the young as essentially wild and pure; as a safe, traditional and peaceful place in which to live. On the other hand, the more locally aimed discourse on dying villages and hopelessness is present as well. Ollila concludes that the young of Lapland, in her research, seem to look at their home region as if through the eyes of a tourist – until prompted to reflect on daily life wherein the pessimism is obvious. (Ibid.: 85–86.)

I am conscious of the threat and simple appeal of blaming welfare research or tourism rhetoric for enforcing stereotypes or false representations and offering authentic representations through my research (see Malmsten 2004). This is not my intention. The rural North is an ever-evolving mesh of countless definitions, driven by countless interests and viewpoints (e.g., Heininen 2007, Ingold 2007). I argue that the viewpoint of the villagers' everyday lives, especially those of women, provides a contribution to this mesh, not that it would replace it altogether.

The aim of this research is not to turn black into white and authoritatively romanticize daily life in a small Lappish village as blissful. Rather, I aim at providing the participants with an opportunity to consider the desirable aspects of their everyday lives – what they perceive as beautiful – and to engage in aesthetising and romanticizing their lives to the extent that they themselves deem it appropriate for their own ends. It matters to the lives of people in the North what others think of their places of dwelling. To be able to concentrate on what is already good enough contributes towards perceived wellbeing (Lähteenmaa 2008, 2006.)

In a way it [writing] has awakened very positive feelings, something like joy, when you realise how much beauty there is around you and in your own life. And gratitude and feelings of happiness are about all the beauty there is. Those kinds of feelings.

–Laura, post-correspondence interview

In this research, the phenomenon of everyday life in a northern village is approached through the disciplines of education, aesthetics, sociology and human geography, as well as supported by environmental ethics. The theoretical and methodological frames have been built to complement the phenomenon and to resonate with the data. The theoretical frame for this research leans on Wittgenstein's (e.g., 1966) notions of language use: language is woven into the actions of everyday life, used not only to describe but to act on and transform the world.¹ The investigation of ordinary language is described as a method of Wittgenstein that is underused and undiscussed in secondary literature due to it being mistaken as naïve or simplistic (Savickey 1999: 150). The center of reference for Wittgenstein, and adapted in this research as well, is not statements or philosophical assertions but the *use of words in ordinary human lives* (ibid.: 111). In this research, I have approached the use of beauty in everyday life as a linguistic categorization of a non-linguistic experience (as in Mandoki 2007).

¹ It is imperative to locate my work specifically to the so-called “later Wittgenstein”; that is, to the era of “Philosophical Investigations” (Wittgenstein 1953/2001) rather than that culminating with “Tractatus” (Wittgenstein 1921/1961). I have used Wittgenstein's Lectures on Aesthetics (1966) as a base for my theoretical framework on beauty as a linguistic expression in everyday life. Although the 1966 Lectures and Conversations is not widely used within aesthetics or in particular aesthetics of everyday life to which it would be well suited, Wittgenstein's aesthetic notions have been probed in general (e.g., Slater 1983, Tam 2002, Lewis 2004).

The method of data collection in this research is letter writing; more specifically, correspondence. There are four participants in this research who engaged in a yearlong correspondence with me, exchanging letters with each other once a month. I call this correspondence “collective” as the participants always read each others’ letters. The use of correspondence in general and a collectively organized one in particular is a novel approach to data collection. Its methodological development, especially in article I, can be considered one of the central outcomes of this research.

This research has been an individually crafted project due to the novel combination of aesthetics and education outside of the subject area of art education. It has been conducted and funded as part of two adjacent research projects: PLACEs² and LiP.³ The approach of both projects to life in remote northern Finnish villages is multidisciplinary, the groups hosting members from human geography and environmental sociology in addition to education. Theoretical and methodological frames of research dominant in these groups can be labeled phenomenological and naturalistic, embracing ethnography and especially narrative inquiry. In spite of existing as an independent project within these wider projects, my research has been influenced by the above-mentioned approaches and frames.

1.2 The context of beauty: introducing the village of Suvanto and the four participants

The village of Suvanto, located in Finland well above the Arctic Circle, in the municipality of Pelkosenniemi, is a known village due to its cultural and historically significant buildings. The village is situated 27 kilometers north of the Pyhä-Luosto National Park and fell resort center and 20 kilometers from the nearest town, Pelkosenniemi. Suvanto was established along the Kitinen River around the end of 17th century as a self-sufficient agricultural village. The population of the village peaked in the 1950s and declined again following the rapid structural change that began nationwide around the 1960s (Onnela 2006: 26, 114, Pihkala *et al.* 1986: 14, Pipping 1978: 220.) At the time of collecting data for this research in 2007, the population of Suvanto was 27 people in 15 houses. Of

² Place and Environment in the Stories of Northern People, led by Professor Leena Syrjälä (University of Oulu), funded by the Thule Institute of University of Oulu, 2006–2010.

³ Life in Place, led by professor Leena Syrjälä (University of Oulu), funded by the Academy of Finland, 2008–2011 (project number 121109).

the 27, five were under 18 and the rest above 40 (Suvanto Village Association 2007). Summer residents and vacationers more than double the village population during holiday periods.

Of the 27 inhabitants of Suvanto, none are engaged in primary production. Seven villagers are retired, the underage children are undergoing education, seven villagers are unemployed and the rest are employed outside of the village, mainly in public and private sectors of services. Only a couple of villagers have permanent positions. Others juggle with part-time and short-term contracts (Suvanto Village Association 2007.)

Suvanto received attention in national media in the 1980s as a “drowning village” (e.g., Hakanen 1982, Ruokanen 1981, Salokorpi 1981, 1985) when a plan to build a hydroelectric power plant in the Kitinen River running past the village threatened to raise the water level drastically. The plan was realized from 1987–1990 with a compromised raise in the water level. The interest and support from the media as well as that of the National Board of Antiquities prior to the damming plans⁴ made the villagers realize the distinctiveness and cultural historical value of their village in a concrete way. By the time our research group arrived to the village, the villagers had gotten used to being interviewed, filmed and photographed, as this had occurred over the past three decades. This meant that when beginning the research project PLACEs in 2006, our research group encountered no opposition but rather support from the villagers to the suggestion of referring to the village by its proper name instead of a pseudonym. This decision granted us the welcomed freedom to address questions pertaining to the particular geographical location that some members of our group proposed. However, by naming it a village of some thirty inhabitants, a considerable challenge arose in retaining the anonymity of individual participants. This challenge is especially felt in this research in which the everyday lives of four participants unfold for a period of one year.

In January 2007, I arrived to Suvanto for the second time ever. It was the first time for me to meet the participants of my research in person. I had approached a local research assistant earlier with details of my research and she had provided me with a list of interested participants. This, in all of its simplicity, is the sampling strategy of this research: I aimed at finding people who would view the research topic as provisionally interesting enough to stick with me for a year. The

⁴ The National Board of Antiquities had helped in organizing several restoration projects of old buildings in Suvanto (Pihkala *et.al.* 1986).

topic of beauty in everyday life was thus embraced by the participants to begin with. Of the original list of five, one had dropped out even before our first meeting. He was the only man in the group. The four remaining women and I met on a January evening over a cup of tea and agreed to embark on this research into everyday beauty together.

To the hesitant reader, the fact that there are only four participants will be justified as this summary progresses. The explication of the choices of theoretical as well as methodological foci and means aim to give sufficient ground to the relatively small number of participants. The sheer amount of data gathered and produced with the four is indicative of the contextual depth that this research opts for as opposed to obtaining a quantity of participants. The 44 letters exchanged add up to 114 mostly typewritten sheets of text, and the supplementing data of 10 interviews comprise some 200 sheets of transcribed text. It is also relevant to see this research as a decidedly focused part of the previously-mentioned wider research project *Life in Place* in which a host of interviews were conducted in two small Lappish villages.

The participants of this research, Erja, Seija, Laura and Kaarina, appear in this research according to pseudonyms and without detailed characteristics. All have, however, accepted that among the villagers and perhaps the Pelkosenniemi area more widely, their identities might be traceable through this research. The limits and possibilities this less-than-complete anonymity sets for this research are discussed as they pertain to the research design and choice of the data collection method in article I, as well as in chapter 5.2, which concerning the evaluation of this study.

Erja is one of the younger participants, the age distribution in the group being roughly 35 to 75 excluding myself, age 30, at the time of data collection. Erja is single and had moved to the village from the urban South of Finland less than 10 years ago. She describes her move to Suvanto as a means of detaching herself from a life of futile running around that she does not wish to progress nor be part of. Erja is employed in a nearby town.

Seija is the mother of two grown children. She is native to the village and has lived in Suvanto virtually all of her life. The rhythms of her everyday life echo those of the long-gone agricultural life of the village. Seija is seasonally employed in the tourist industry, working in the proximity of the nearby fell resort.

Laura moved to Suvanto some 15 years ago. She is married to a local man, and they have underage children. Laura's children make up the majority of the

village's underage population. She is mostly unemployed with occasional periods of part-time employment.

Kaarina is the oldest participant. She moved to Suvanto some 50 years ago, having married a local man. She does not have children. She has been, and still is, self-employed in a tourist business with her husband.

Together, these four women comprise a group that varies in age, education, employment, family structure and length of stay in the village. What they share, aside from gender, is a view of their home village as a place good enough to live in. None of them has expressed a desire to leave.

1.3 Objectives of the research and position of the researcher

The two initial objectives motivating this research were to shed light on two underdogs: everyday lives in remote northern villages and the significance of beauty in everyday life. These initial objectives have since been focused, intertwined with and informed by the processes of data collection and analysis as well as by the emerging results.

The objectives of this research are to:

1. Complement the art-centered definitions of the notion of beauty through research into particular people's use of beauty as a linguistic expression and an evaluative judgment in their everyday lives.
2. Argue for the significance of diversity of habitable places, including those that are remote and rural, thereby contributing to the evaluation of state policies that affect everyday lives in these places to the extent that they are in danger of becoming inhabitable.
3. Contribute positively to the prevailing negative research rhetoric on life in northern Finnish villages; to illustrate the kinds of everyday lives that are perceived as good enough in these seemingly dying villages.

These objectives are tackled with three research tasks unfolding as descriptive, interpretative and methodological respectively:

1. Of what kind is perceived beauty in everyday life led in a small northern village? (especially article II and article IV)
2. What is the significance of considering beauty in everyday life? (especially article III and article IV)

3. What kind of data does correspondence yield on perceived beauty?
(especially article I)

My position as the researcher in this project is best approached through my academic background. I began as an undergraduate student of Art History in Helsinki, the very south of Finland. Before changing my major to Education, I ventured to complete a Bachelor's degree in Photography in the United Kingdom. In all of these fields, I have embraced the ordinary. From the seminar papers in Art History in which I chose to concentrate on the work of a Finnish conceptual artist, photographer Lauri Anttila, to the Bachelor's dissertation dealing with family photography, I have embraced the value in the ordinary. Towards the completion of my Master's thesis in Education, I had developed a strong conviction that the ordinary, all things mundane and in danger of being labeled as trivial, are worthy of research for they make up the majority of our lives.

I have adopted an approach to Education that is best described as one with attention to *growing* rather than to teaching, learning or education. In my Master's thesis, I approached the significance of art museum visits for ageing women (Rautio 2005). I discussed this significance in light of the women's life stories. This doctoral thesis is thus a continuation of what was begun a long time ago. From the categories and labels of informal education or self-education, I have moved on to discussing everyday life and the making of it as thoroughly educational, as it pertains to one's growth as a human being.

In beginning this research project, I had also closed a spatial circle in my life. I had once taken off from the relative north of Finland (middle considered from the perspective of Lapland, northern from the viewpoint of Helsinki), pursued academic degrees in both Helsinki and the south of England and then returned to Oulu, close to the town of Raahe, where I was born and to a region that to me felt like the North. I wanted to raise my firstborn in the same environment in which I had grown up.

In this research, education is to be understood as that which signifies the perpetual growth present in everyday life and defines our lives as human beings. This definition, with its attention to what lies outside of the institutions of education, derives from a belief that the ordinary entails a profound ethical base on which all education cumulates. It is in the crevices of everyday life that Henry David Thoreau's "wild" exists (Thoreau 1854/1997, see also Bennett 1994). By providing us with a possibility of change and growth, attention to the wild, to me, is the locus of education, of growing as a human being.

1.4 An overview of the articles

The original articles this thesis comprises are presented in the order in which they were written (articles I and II were written simultaneously). The evolving and focusing of objectives and tasks as the research process progressed is thus evident.

Article I has a methodological emphasis and a special focus on the method of correspondence in data collection. Correspondence is presented as an underused method and characterized by introducing the concepts of invisibility, time and tangibility. The phenomenon under research is identified as one's aesthetic engagement in everyday-life surroundings. Everyday life and beauty are both presented as unfolding and evolving through time and thus requiring a method of data collection that would complement such dynamics. Discussion of the collectivity present in the correspondence leads to budding insights into shared frames and meaning making. I conclude in the article that the letters seem to convey beauty in surviving rather than in spite of surviving. This idea evolves through the subsequent articles to finally culminate in a key insight: when the environment of one's everyday life proposes challenges that require creative responses, life feels as though it were of one's own making, resulting in feelings of agency (discussed further in chapter 4.2).

Article II aims at providing a descriptive overview of the correspondence data: 44 letters. The argument that carries this article is that the context of particular lives is significant when considering beauty as an educationally relevant concept. Empirical research on perceived beauty is discussed as being necessary but, at the same time, challenging. It is in this article that the object of the entire research shifts from the actual aesthetic experiences to the conscious reflecting of them in writing, to the use of beauty in particular contexts. Analysis of the data, as a whole, results in four shared and recurring themes: doings, surroundings, animals and time, all of which entail a judgment of things being in place; being as they should. Distinct patterns of reflecting are discussed as they pertain to the lives of each participant. The insights of this article contribute particularly to the notion of attending to beauty as an act of locating one's life existentially: temporally and spatially (discussed further in chapter 4.1).

Article III utilizes an in-depth approach to one recurring theme in the letters of one participant: the hanging of laundry to dry, by Laura. This focus is chosen in order to address the significance and use of beauty by a particular individual and pertains to education, as relevant for the constitutive and perpetual level of her

growth as a human being. I conclude in the article that the place of beauty in Laura's writing is an occasional checking of direction. This checking happens in relation to changes both in the context of her everyday life and in herself as a person. The idea of beauty being used for orienting oneself in life further explores the locative function that was proposed in article II and begins to close in on the significance of considering one's self-conception as taking form through active engagement with one's surroundings.

Article IV discusses the relations of two participants to the environments in which they live. The ways in which Erja and Seija relate to their environments easily convey anthropocentrism, an often unwanted approach to the environment. The article concludes with the suggestion that when considered in-depth in context and as mediated communicatively through writing, the ways in which Erja and Seija relate to their non-human environments are those of enforcing connectedness and can be considered non-anthropocentric. Attending to beauty is considered to be an act of relating to one's surroundings: a linguistic label placed on various things in the search for a functional fit.⁵ In this article, the emerging result of this research as a whole is well evident: the ability to relate to the environment in which you live in a personally meaningful and creative way is facilitated by an environment of diversity. This conclusion is presented in detail in chapter 5.2 as part of the discussion.

⁵ The concept of functional fit introduced by Allen Carlson (2007) is central to this research in terms of facilitating the appreciation of human environments as evolved wholes rather than as deliberately designed products. This is discussed in detail in chapter 2.2.1.

2 Theoretical framework

2.1 Everyday life

Who has not read a magazine headline suggesting that we should escape our everyday lives every now and then? But try then to come up with a watertight definition of what everyday life is and there is puzzlement in store for you. Is it the time between Monday and Friday? Does it take place at home or at work? What would be excluded from everyday life? For such an elusive concept as everyday life, the number of times we are confronted with the suggestion to run away from it seems curious. Rather than urging anyone to escape, I ask the participants in this research to concentrate and dwell on what they perceive to be their everyday lives.⁶

The theoretical frame of this research utilizes discourses on everyday life in which ordinary people are seen as creative agents whose actions shape, create and respond to everyday life in a set context. In addition to Lefebvre (e.g., 2000) from whom I take the notion of rhythm, repetition and process in defining everyday life, and de Certeau (1989) from whom I apply the notions of strategies and tactics in use, I also include Charles Taylor and Ludwig Wittgenstein in the theoretical framework. From Taylor (1989), I take the approach to one's self-conception that a self exists in between an individual and her environment – it takes shape through the process of orienting and engaging in “ordinary life.” Taylor also points out that this process of orienting involves articulation: we find sense in life through articulating it. And finding sense is as much about finding as it is inventing; coming up with an adequate articulation. (Ibid.: 18.)

And finally, ordinary everyday language, “the prose of the world,” is taken as an ensemble of practices from Wittgenstein (1966, also de Certeau 1984: 12, Crary 2000, Cravell 2000, Savickey 1999). Language and everyday life are seen as intertwined. Ordinary language is considered to be understood in its appropriate context.

Everyday life is a process that unfolds in but is not limited to time and space. A Monday does not constitute everyday life, nor does a particular location or scene (i.e., one's home on a Monday morning between waking up and going to

⁶ An alternative to the notion of “everyday life” would have been the related phenomenological “lifeworld” (e.g., Husserl 1970). The sociological notion of everyday life is chosen in this research over lifeworld due to a decision to challenge the notion of everyday life as necessarily a field of power struggles.

work). The valid question concerning research of everyday life is thus, “How is it?” rather than “What is it?” (e.g., Jokinen 2005, see also Felski 2000). To ask how everyday life is, is to explore the ways in which everyday life can take form both as it is experienced by a subject and researched by someone else. In research, everyday life has been described using the notions of time, space, rhythm, bodily movement, and tradition (Ellegård & Cooper 2004, Ellegård & Vilhelmsson 2004, Jokinen 2003, 2005, Lefebvre 2004, Lehtinen 2006, see also Kyrönlampi-Kylmänen 2007). These characterizations entail a phenomenologically charged idea of a continuum, experienced and holistically engaged with phenomena in time and space. In this research, everyday life is considered as having been made rather than merely taken in or undergone. The notion of everyday life is defined around the core of an active subject. Interest is focused on the ways of creating everyday life.

This kind of definition entailing an actively constructed everyday life could be taken as representing a well-rehearsed modernist idea of individualism: a constant need to produce your life over again.⁷ Life politics at the core of this discourse are about a modern person empowering herself, gaining control over her life and knowing herself (Beck 1992, Giddens 1991, see also Debord 1983). If one believes in the modern idea of a risk society as an increasingly insecure place in which people are obliged to make their own lives and construct their own biographies, the world begins to look bleak. It starts to become reminiscent of a world of do-it-yourself lives with daunting possibilities of the failure to construct a valid life.

The definition of everyday life in this research as that which is made by an active subject is not to be taken as one that sides with the discourse on modern individualism. The scale, as well as the quality and objective of actions, differs. Kevin Melchionne (2007: 183) insightfully uses the term “orchestrating” in discussing domestic actions entailing grace: those that exemplify the art of living well. In his definition, like that of mine in this research, there is an agent, someone responsible for the orchestrating of domestic processes.⁸

Melchionne’s use of metaphor is relevant for the clarifying of this research as it implies that the making of everyday life is a creative process of responding to a

⁷ During the 20th century, the concept of the everyday became, especially in the field of sociology, a critical category for not only confronting but changing the present for the purposes of social transformation (Jokinen 2005, Papastergiadis 2006).

⁸ Melchionne (2007) discusses “domestic processes” as a subfield of everyday life rather than defining everyday life as mere domestic actions.

host of variables rather than a strategic process of choosing between competing options, the latter being an approach the modernist discourse would propose.

The making of everyday life is similar to orchestrating a symphony for a number of different instruments. The skills needed in order to achieve a beautiful outcome adhere, above all, to one's sensibility. They increase with more time, more orchestrating and with more listening to music. The notion of "impressionistic knowledge" of Carl Bereiter and Marlene Scardamalia (1993, Bereiter 2002) is of use here. Impressionistic knowledge is that of a wine taster, growing and improving with experience, and only experience. The skills of making everyday life addressed in this research are of this kind. The skills that a modernist discourse on risk society and the demand to construct your own life imply are quite different. These are the abilities to make strategic decisions concerning education, employment, social circles or skills for acquiring the right kind of Bourdieuan capital in order to make a successful life (e.g., Bourdieu and Waquant 1992, see also Beck 1992.) However insightful we consider Bourdieu and his followers to have been and accept that it is imperative to know how social structures influence everyday lives, we should not neglect to observe how individual activities in everyday life also challenge and alleviate those structures while experienced (Tuomi-Gröhn 2008).

Take for instance Seija, a participant of this research. She is seasonally employed. Her husband has been unemployed for a long time. They know they could stand a better chance of finding permanent jobs should they move further south. Erja, another participant, made a conscious choice to move to this village of thirty inhabitants as a single woman. She misses the social contacts she used to have but is determined to stay. From the viewpoint of life politics and strategic decisions, the making of everyday life for Seija and Erja seems either incoherent or motivated by resistance. From the viewpoint of daily activities and transactions, a view less taken (Burkitt 2004, Lefebvre 1971/2000, Tuomi-Gröhn 2008), the interpretation is less dramatic: Seija and Erja are competent, creative agents who make good enough everyday lives in a place where they are able to do so.

The scope of this research is also reminiscent of well-established studies on perceived happiness⁹ and its relation to material possessions or surroundings. The

⁹ In literature on perceived happiness, an array of concepts is used to address more or less the same phenomena: subjective wellbeing, perceived wellbeing, perceived happiness and life-satisfaction being the most common (Eugene & Chambers 1989, Frey & Stutzer 2002, Praag *et al.* 2003, Winkelmann & Winkelmann 1998).

level of perceived wellbeing or happiness – terms sometimes used interchangeably – seems to bear no necessary logical connection to the level of, for instance, per capita real income. The connection to one’s employment status and happiness has, however, been proved linear: being unemployed depresses perceived wellbeing (Frey & Stutzer 2002: 403, Winkelmann & Winkelmann 1998). In addition to straightforward questionnaires, even sophisticated models of domain satisfaction¹⁰ provide us with the result that those employed score consistently higher than unemployed in overall life satisfaction (van Praag *et al.* 2003).

The results of this research, albeit not conceptually focused on happiness and not conducted within the field of economics, begin to challenge this finding. Unemployment, or rather sporadic and unsteady employment, does not prevent the participants of this research from finding their lives to be of value or good enough.¹¹ It is evident that methodological choices do affect research outcomes: research reporting the connection between happiness and employment are quantitative and based on the rating of predesigned variables (e.g., van Praag *et al.* 2003). The approach of this research is qualitative. An interesting comparative research on life satisfaction of ageing men in three different countries in which both quantitative and qualitative methods were used showed that quantitative measures yield no significant differences between the compared groups, while qualitative measures (interviews) of the same groups result in marked differences. The authors attribute this disparity to the stripping of context in structured, quantitative approaches (Eugene & Chambers 1989).

In this research, it is through the conception of everyday life as a process unfolding in a particular environment entailing an active agent that context receives emphasis. The results of quantitative research may well be that being unemployed depresses wellbeing. In qualitative research addressing the making of everyday life in a particular environment, the loss or lack of employment is relative to context and the activities undertaken to regain a sense of wellbeing are addressed. Everyday life in a remote village requires extensive driving around.

¹⁰ Domain satisfaction means individual satisfaction related to different domains in life such as health, finances and employment; overall satisfaction with life is an aggregate of various domain satisfactions (van Praag *et al.* 2003).

¹¹ “Good enough” is used here as a notion introduced by the child psychologist D.W. Winnicott (1971) in describing relations between mothers and their infants as having to be good enough rather than perfect. In doing so, Winnicott highlighted a necessary experience pertaining to creative living; that of encountering failure in other people. I will come back to good-enough everyday lives in the final chapter.

Living in an old house generates the need to procure firewood – perhaps to cut down and chop the wood yourself – and to keep fires going in all of the fireplaces. Growing and hunting for most of your food demands time for sowing and for pursuing game. Within this context, seasons of unemployment seem to offer even welcomed breaks for making everyday life good in one’s village.

Social and political structures generate limitations that admittedly resonate in the everyday lives of individuals. This is, however, but one part of a dynamic picture, the following of which would make some lives incomprehensible to us (see also Salmi 2005). For the logic of people’s choices of say, places of dwelling do not always follow those of a market economy or socio-political structures. This seems to be a phenomenon that especially pertains to remote or rural places (Corbett 2008.)

The scale of everyday-life making in this research is one more point worth noticing. Making and shaping one’s everyday life through transformative events has been characterized notably by Henri Lefebvre (1991, also Elden 2004, Merrifield 2006) via his notion of “moments.” These moments are clearly discernible events in one’s everyday life that puncture the flowing of all things mundane; moments of potential life-altering epiphany. It is clear that there is a difference in scale between Lefebvre’s moments and the accounts of beauty discussed in this research. I have called these accounts of beauty “tiny steering maneuvers.” I define them as fleeting moments of orientation that take place in everyday life but that might not stand out on their own – moments that might have gone unnoticed had I not asked the participants to pay attention to beauty (articles I and III).

In conceptualizing the objective of this research further for this summary, I have maintained a distinction between strategy and tactic (de Certeau 1984).¹² Strategies are used to produce – a term de Certeau opts for – everyday life in a conscious and concrete way by institutional subjects, and pertain to power relations. Tactics are mostly unconscious and are used by individuals subjected to strategies to manipulate and divert everyday-life situations: to make do. I have

¹² Although it should be noted that de Certeau’s notions are characteristically pessimistic, leaving tactic as an “art of the weak” in a fight against the strategies of those with power (1984: 37). All in all, the current of academic concern over everyday life in the 20th century has been distinctively negative with regard to its prevalent Marxist origins, with the exception of Lefebvre, whose notion of everyday life took a positive note (Papastergiadis 2006: 32). The outlook of this research is decidedly not bleak, as everyday life is not framed as a power struggle. The use of attending to beauty as a tactic in making everyday life are not interpreted as resistance or fighting “within enemy territory” (de Certeau 1984: 37), rather they are seen as simply making do, yielding everyday life as good enough.

focused on the use the participants make of attending to beauty as a tactic of everyday life; one that is mostly subconscious but is called to the fore, in this case, by the requests of this research. The interface of strategies and tactics opens up possibilities to produce places of dwelling in between which de Certeau (ibid.: 30) describes as creative:

Thus a North African living in Paris or Roubaix (France) insinuates into the system imposed on him [...] the ways of dwelling (in a house or a language) peculiar to his native Kabylia. He superimposes them [strategies and tactics] and, by that combination creates for himself a space [...] he establishes within it a degree of plurality and creativity. By an art of being in between, he draws unexpected results from his situation.

When I began this research, the notion I held of everyday life was that it was dynamic and entailed a creative agent. The conception of beauty I held was more rigid. I thought I would proceed to research how in making everyday lives people would use the things, ideas, events they consider beautiful as they would building blocks. As soon as the letters started to accumulate and my own participation in the writing about everyday beauty intensified, it became obvious that beauty was anything but rigid. Rather, it took shapes and assumed functions far more diverse than that of a building block. In the making of everyday life, beauty has proved to function, among other things, as an evaluative and evolving subjective judgment (article III), a process of relating (article IV) and as a linguistic category used for compiling and condensing relations (this summary, chapter 4.1). In attending to beauty in your everyday life, you are developing the skill of discriminating and cultivating what is desirable in your life.

2.2 Beauty

2.2.1 And aesthetics

Aesthetics, when adhering to the original etymology, is about sense perceptions. As such, sense perceptions are value neutral. The sound of waves and the taste of salty sweat in your mouth while jogging are sensory information (Berleant 2010: 25–30, Mandoki 2007). To call something aesthetic is thus not to proclaim merely admiration, for negative aesthetic experiences also exist (Berleant 2010: 155–174, Saito 2007). Beauty, on the contrary, is indeed a linguistic expression of aesthetic

admiration. In this research, beauty is defined as a particular kind of linguistic categorization of a non-linguistic, subjective experience (Mandoki 2007). It is an inherently positive categorization for experiences deemed, according to the subjective value of candidates, to be labeled as “beautiful.” At the same time, it is an elusive categorization. Although existing as a concept and word so commonly used, “beautiful” is peculiarly difficult to define (Armstrong 2004: 8). It is easily conceived of as an adjective, a misconception which would lead us to think of beauty as describing a certain quality of an object. Rather, “beautiful” is to be approached through the complicated instances in which it is used (Wittgenstein 1966: 1–11) as part of ordinary language (see Savickey 1999), and taken as articulating a relation of an experiencing subject to the experienced object. This research entails a focused investigation into one instance in which the use of beauty in this way is apparent; the action of laundry hanging (article III), resulting in a description of an iterative process of seeking a fit between a subjective non-linguistic experience and the linguistic expression of it.

Beauty is a battered concept. It was seen by Plato and many a thinker to come (see e.g., Murdoch 1977, Scarry 2006: 25, 30–31, Winston 2008) to bear a connection to truth and thus to appear as the crux of aspirations for a human being. It has, however, taken blows and moved in various directions since. As an enduring concept, beauty has evoked retrospective tracings of these directions over centuries (recently see e.g., Armstrong 2004, Eco 2005). The directions most pertinent to discuss in relation to this research are those of trivialization of beauty within aesthetics and the severing of it from practice. Both have contributed to the fact that, until recently, a discussion of the significance of beauty as experienced in everyday life would have lacked credibility as an academic endeavor.

The most devastating and well-known blow to beauty can be traced back to when Edmund Burke (1757/1998) and Immanuel Kant (1790/2007: 35–164) began to discuss beauty as opposed to what had begun to be called the sublime (Scarry 2006: 82). Lists of characteristics distinguishing “beautiful” from “sublime” sought to show that the former was feminine and the latter masculine: things sublime were grand, while things beautiful were small. The application of this mutually exclusive division led to a disregard of continuity in perception. Scarry (ibid.) uses an example of meadow flowers in an “August silence of ancient groves.” Whereas prior to the distinction between beautiful and sublime, the meadow flowers would have been appreciated as part of the totality of the silent August scene, with the new division, the flowers are seen as a counterpoint to the sublimity of the ancient groves: as *merely* beautiful (Scarry 2006: 82–85).

In addition to being demoted as a diminutive against sublime, beauty as part of aesthetic expressions of admiration has also been dissociated with ordinary life. During the simultaneous development in the eighteenth century of aesthetics as a discipline and fine art as opposed to practice, aesthetic judgments, beauty among them, were restricted to the consideration of art and nature in academic discussion. Beauty was held pure and ideal, incompatible with use and corrupted by practice (Berleant 2010: 32–33). Contemplative distance and detachment, as well as disinterestedness, have for a long time been conceived as the epitome of aesthetic enjoyment proper, rendering the discipline of aesthetics to be limited to being synonymous with the philosophy of art (Berleant 2010: 34, Light & Smith 2005, Mandoki 2007, Santayana 1955: 12). The realm of everyday experiences, imbued with practical concerns is by definition interested and engaged and has stayed outside of aesthetic consideration for quite some time.

The opposition to what could be called a subjectivist conception of an aesthetic object lies in the seeming lack of value hierarchies or guidelines for judging that this approach is seen to entail (e.g., Irvin 2009a, 2009b, Stevens 2008). In choosing to emphasize the relation between a subject and an object and bring forth the transformative mental processes of the subject, the threat of aesthetic judgments dissolving into relativism is evident: simply anything could be considered a valid object of aesthetic worth (Leddy 2005). To avoid this notion of beauty being in the eye of the beholder, an idea that would seem relativist is, however, to avoid recognizing the value in contemplating our own attraction to the objects we conceive as beautiful. It is to avoid the deepening and refining of our attachment to beauty in our lives (Armstrong 2004, Irvin 2008). To argue that attending to beauty has a potentially transformative effect in one's everyday life calls for an approach to aesthetics that does not seek universal value hierarchies nor concentrate only on the aesthetic object. Such an approach is not to be thought of as relativistic but as relational (Naess 1989: 54–55, 74). Beauty is taken as being inextricably interwoven into the context in which it appears.

In following a view of beauty that highlights the context rather than the subject or object alone, the notion of functional fit as discussed by Allen Carlson (2007) yields insights. In appreciating our surroundings or nature aesthetically, we are not attending to a design but to an evolved whole. If designed objects, such as pieces of art, can be judged in terms of “organic unity,” human environments can be judged aesthetically in terms of their fit to a larger whole, according to Carlson. When a functional fit is evident, there is an ambience of everything being all right and in place. This fit is well evident in the letters of this research

(article II). The seeking of beauty in everyday life is about seeking a functional fit. I will propose in chapter 4.1 that such a practice is not only about assessing the fit of perceived elements in your environment as a whole but also assessing the fit of yourself and your life to the context in which you lead it. Attending to beauty produces existentially locative reflection explicit in passages of spatial and temporal locating in the letters (article II).

In not shying away but embracing practice and interestedness, the notion of functional fit facilitates the aesthetic consideration of everyday-life environments. The kinds of movements within aesthetics that lead away from only the arts and towards the inclusion of everyday life and human environments have been those of environmental aesthetics (e.g., Berleant 2005, 2010, Carlson 2004, Sepänmaa 1986) and everyday-life aesthetics (e.g., Irvin 2009b, Leddy 2005, Light & Smith 2005, Mandoki 2007, Saito 2007). What these movements share is the challenging of the notions of detachment and disinterestedness. Arnold Berleant (e.g., 1993) proposes instead “engagement” and Katya Mandoki (2007) adds proximity and interestedness to the equation so that the two sides begin to swing back and forth. I have touched on this alteration of distance and proximity as “relational reflection” evident in the data of this research in article II.

2.2.2 And growing

What are the uses of beauty, aesthetics or art? What are they good for? These questions belong to the discussion of curriculum development and the fate of art education in new plans. In defending art education, it is common to resort to accounting for all of the uses that the arts are said to have for education¹³. Art is thus made into a utility. It has been assigned a measurable instrumental value in order to be able to compete with other subject areas for diminishing resources.

Another discussion currently making headlines is the plan to increase building in the still intact fell of the Pallas National Park in Lapland. The beautiful scenery is set against development possibilities for tourism and the employment situation of the area – money. What is the use and value of a beautiful landscape of the fell Pallas? In situations in which measurable

¹³ See for example the material of a seminar on the reformation of national basic education on the part of art education in it, held on November 13th 2009, organized by the Finnish National Board of Education:
http://www.oph.fi/hankkeet/perusopetuksen_yleisten_tavoitteiden_ja_tuntijaon_uudistaminen/seminaarimateriaalit

instrumental values conflict with intangible and elusive intrinsic values, the instrumental values usually have the upper hand.¹⁴ The way to go is not to start masking intrinsic value with instrumental value and listing benefits as if they could always be measured. The sounder, yet more difficult, battle would be to respect the intrinsic nature of the value of perceiving beauty and approach quality rather than quantity. This would direct attention to the fact that beauty is both particular and universal. It is a subjective value statement. However, as a process of affirming our existence, relations and growing can also be held as an indicator of profound and shared ways of orienting in everyday lives as human beings (DesJardins 2006: 131, Kotkavirta 2003, Winston 2006). Beauty conceived of as having intrinsic value determines who we are, not what we have (see Sagoff as quoted in DesJardins *ibid*).

There are two strands of thought that seem to roughly comprise the discussion, the little there is, in favor of the significance of beauty in general and in education: 1) beauty has instrumental value, and 2) beauty has intrinsic value. I will first outline these two strands and then propose that the definition I use in this research for beauty calls for a slightly amended approach of the latter strand. In trying to argue that beauty is relevant for one's growth as a human being, I have traced instances of how people use it (especially articles III and IV). This is to be understood as an attempt to understand how people come to perceive things as beautiful, not as a means of tracing the usefulness of beauty.

The instrumental value in having aesthetic experiences, among them perceiving beauty, is claimed to reside in a variety of concrete and desirable outcomes such as that beauty soothes one, relieves tension and correlates with an even temperament. Suggestions like this have been presented for a long time by pioneers influential in aesthetics such as Monroe Beardsley and David Hume (Carroll 2010: 8–9). A brief overview of the *Journal of Aesthetic Education* from the past couple of years (2008–2010) shows that whether it is about employing films to support pre-service teachers' capacities for imagination (Fontaine 2010)

¹⁴ Of the various ways to define and thus confuse intrinsic value (Kotkavirta 2003, also Lemos 1994) it is defined here as a synonym for non-instrumental value: something that has intrinsic value is valued for itself rather than for its uses. In environmental ethics, intrinsic value is often taken to mean something that has value independent of our subjective valuations (DesJardins 2006: 130). Quite interestingly, it can also be argued that our subjective aesthetic valuations (beauty) direct our attention to what has intrinsic value, independent of these valuations (Kotkavirta 2003). As this research is precisely about our subjective valuations, the intrinsic value of beauty as a process of articulating relations perceived desirable is considered as *intrinsic to the process* as opposed to instrumental, depending on a certain measurable outcome of the process.

or finding a pedagogical framework for dialogue about nudity and dance art (Jaeger 2009), the discussion of the usefulness of aesthetic experiences, beauty among them, although rarely discussed particularly, is instrumental and invariably art-centered. I do not claim that perceived beauty does not relieve tension or that films do not support teachers' capacities for imagination. I suggest that this line of instrumental reasoning is perhaps not the best, at least not the only way to articulate the significance of art, aesthetics or beauty for growing and education.

Pragmatist approaches held by, for instance, John Dewey (1934) in *Art as Experience* have fared well in combining aesthetic experiences with education and greatly alleviated the institutional art-centeredness of aesthetics (Irvin 2009b, Shusterman 2010). These approaches are less instrumental and more prone to addressing the engagement of the perceiver with an object deemed as aesthetically pleasing but have, nevertheless, been criticized as being restrictive for the use of everyday aesthetics. This is due to Dewey's distinction between non-aesthetic and aesthetic experiences of which the latter should exhibit qualitative unity and closure (1934: 44). It is argued, notably by Sherri Irvin (e.g., 2008) that our everyday lives also comprise open-ended and scattered moments that can still qualify as aesthetic experiences (see articles II and III on the challenges of empirical research of such fleeting moments).

In discussing beauty and proposing that it has intrinsic value, Joe Winston (2006, see also 2008 and 2010) leans on Iris Murdoch's idea that the experience of beauty can be seen as educational in itself, without instrumentalist utilitarian objectives. This way of apprehending the value of beauty relies on its benevolence and moral force rather than on its social utility. Jussi Kotkavirta (2003) regards aesthetic experiences in general to be significant in that they unveil what is intrinsically good for us.

The instrumentalist strand directs attention to what happens after encountering an aesthetic object, rendering little agency to the perceiving subject. The intrinsic strand can be seen to emphasize the subject and his/her inner growing in focusing on experiences during an aesthetic encountering. The former does not complement and the latter does not fully address the approach of this research in which beauty is defined in terms of an activity between subject and object: an activity that is evolving in focus through iterative processes. An approach to addressing the value of beauty as conceived of in this research calls for attention to the process of relating. Such an approach is presented by Susan Feagin (2010), who proposes a non-instrumentalist functionalism that yields significance to the activity of appreciating what is of value, rather than

concentrating on the experience gained in perceiving a work/an object.¹⁵ This approach allows us to consider the choice and intentional seeking of beauty in one's life preceding the actual encounter. I have discussed this attitude as one of embracing serendipity; of being open to experiences (article III). Noninstrumentalist functionalism lets us discuss the iterative process of cumulative accounts of beauty, not just individual instances. This is how it connects with the idea of growing – the quest to become human that is perpetual in essence.

Katya Mandoki's (2007) idea of aesthetic swinging, the alteration between proximity and distance, in my view, fits well with Feagin's thought and with this research. Both Mandoki and Feagin address the actual process of aesthetic appreciation in a way that yields the perceiving subject agency during the experience as well as during the time preceding and following the experience. In perceiving beauty, the perceiver is not blinded by a distanced awe over some object, incapable of acting as an agent. Nor is he/she submerged in action and proximity or biased by interested feelings to the extent that distant appreciation becomes impossible. There is, instead, an altering of the two, controlled and actively used by the perceiver.¹⁶ This is where I have begun to trace the link between education and beauty (article III).

The participants of this research wrote about beauty mostly as something not found objectively but appearing in the relations they became aware of having to their surroundings amid everyday concerns. They often referred to beauty as something they could choose – an attitude even. Perceived beauty was portrayed as invented or created in addition to simply being found (article III.) The process of seeking beauty in your everyday life is similar to applying the articulation of "beautiful" to various experiences, events and objects and seeing if it fits. The fit is not always instant and final. Rather, it is often contestable. Some accounts of beauty might crumble or be modified in the course of everyday life, but the ones that endure start to affirm the aspects in your everyday life that convey a functioning fit – that are beautiful. That is, they express meaningful relations.

¹⁵ Albeit Feagin discusses the appreciation of works of art rather than aesthetic appreciation in everyday life.

¹⁶ Jussi Kotkavirta (2003: 87-88) uses alternating distinctions by Martin Seel (1991) between three forms or phases of an aesthetic experience: contemplative, responsive and imaginative, and takes these to be present in rich aesthetic experiences. This trinity addresses the process of aesthetic appreciation in a manner that yields creative agency to the perceiver but is left out from the scope of this research as it focuses on experiences rather than iterative and cumulative processes of articulating experiences over a period of time – something that this research opts for as a focus.

I have called this process of seeking beauty aesthetising. This is something that is usually apprehended as inauthentic and somehow opposed to and subjected to pure aesthetic elements that are not in need of aesthetising and those instantly received as beautiful (article II). This research is decidedly about aesthetising; of considering aspects of your everyday life as potentially beautiful (article IV) and in doing so, deepening your experiences. Aesthetising is to be conceived of as an attitude of adapting and creative responding (Irvin 2008, Mandoki 2008).

The aesthetising of everyday life is essentially about evaluating the changes taking place in you and your relation to your surroundings – your everyday life as a process of the whole (article III). Aesthetising or the notion of beauty in general as thoroughly relational is held by, for instance, John Dewey (1934: 130) and Allen Carlson (2007) along with Scarry (2006) and perhaps Winston (2006). In learning to see aesthetically, to relate aesthetically to your surroundings and to see beauty is learning to decenter yourself (Scarry 2006, also article III). But to be able to decenter, one needs to be aware of relations and one's own position to begin with.

In learning to see beauty, you learn to see and evaluate relations in your life. It is this notion that Scarry holds as the key to connecting beauty with justice and Dewey and Carlson as the key to criticizing the separation of a perceiving individual from the environment she or he lives in. It is this notion of relationality that I hold as the key to holding beauty as a valid concept for education, both that of instructing children and the growth of all humans. An experience of being in relation to other entities is labeled beautiful when it is a relation of fitness and reciprocal adaptation among the members of a whole; when there is “variety in unity” in a way that the members of a whole are distinct but necessarily interdependent and interacting (Dewey 1934: 130, 161).

Beauty is missing as a concept in contemporary educational discourse. This is surprisingly so, even when the discourse is about art and art education (Winston 2006). One of the reasons for this could be that beauty is conceived of in a static way. In other words, beauty is viewed as a certain quality of an object or a certain response of a subject to an object. This makes beauty appear rather narrow and ill-fitted for the use of education. The results of this research suggest the broadening of the concept of beauty as it pertains to education, based on how particular people use the expression amid their everyday lives. Beauty is to be defined as anything but static and fixed. Beauty locates through a reiterative process of seeking elements in your everyday life that contest and affirm the direction of your life (article III). Beauty is used in compiling bundles of

meaningful and desired relations relevant for everyday life. In attending to beauty, you attend to changes in yourself and in your growth as a human being. In addition to advocating for beauty as an educational imperative along with Joe Winston (2006, 2008, 2010), I advocate that attention be placed on the way beauty, as a linguistic expression, is used in everyday life in thoroughly educational ways.

2.2.3 And gender

I thought of it today, that we are all women; it was probably much easier to write because of that. If there had been both women and men, we would then have written in a different way.

– Discussion in the post-correspondence group interview

The idea that beauty is a topic for women has deep roots. The participants of this research recognized this idea but when prompted to account for the reasons behind it, were puzzled. While claiming they would have written in a different way had there been men participating in the correspondence, the women could not, however, elaborate on what this different way would have been like, i.e., what would be included, left out or rephrased. Having said this, I need to point out that the fact that our group consisted of only women had not explicitly entered our discussions prior to my asking about it in the very last group interview. I, for one, would like to think that the strong association of beauty with the feminine is fading.

It was not my intention to collect a group of only women participants. On the other hand, I did not go out of my way to get men to participate either. The wish to alleviate a gendered view on beauty as a concept is one of the reasons behind my decision not to portray this research as explicitly gendered. Because of the history of beauty as a concept with strong connotations to women and because all of the participants in this research, including the researcher herself, are women, the topic is unavoidable. Further, it is not just unavoidable, but is also necessary.

Susan Sontag (2007) fiercely argues that the association of beauty with women is a flaw of history. For Sontag, the discrediting of beauty needs to be understood as a result of the age-old denigration of the female. Sontag is not alone in this. Thomas Leddy (1995: 267) and Yuriko Saito (2007: 152–153) discuss the marginalization of everyday aesthetic qualities within modern aesthetics in general, linking this to the association of numerous everyday

aesthetic actions to “women’s work” like cleaning, doing dishes and hanging laundry, as of low status and/or trivial. Saito points out that even among women themselves, those who clean for others have a low social status. Everyday acts driven by aesthetic judgments, such as noticing of dirt and the commencing vacuuming, are neglected as subject matter for aesthetic enquiry due to the long-standing discrediting of both women as a gender and beauty as a concept.

Kevin Melchionne (2007: 182–183) argues it is time to articulate a gender neutral aesthetic of everyday-life domestic processes. He writes of feminism and the art of domesticity, of homemaking as cultivation rather than servitude. All the while, he notes that attempts to articulate an art of domesticity run the risk of being taken as nothing more than whitewashing the subordination of women. He proposes, like Leddy and Saito, that the neglect of the art of the home is adjacent to the neglect of so many other arts traditionally practiced by women.

The ambivalence between appropriate and trivial topics of aesthetic attention – the belief that such a distinction is possible or relevant – is evident in the beginning of article III. In the article, one domestic practice, the hanging of laundry to dry, is discussed as a valid subject matter for aesthetic inquiry. Laura, the participant writing about laundry, had already brought the topic up in our first meeting as a group in January. She shared an experience of deriving aesthetic pleasure from hanging laundry to dry. As if realizing that this could sound trivial and amusing, she then laughed at herself for making such a funny remark. In her letters, however, she continued to write about hanging laundry. And later, in a post-correspondence interview, she was astonished to find out about having done so. She could not recollect writing all that much about laundry.

This case of Laura suggests that the deep-rooted association of everyday-life aesthetic observations, of beauty in mundane things and environments, being inappropriate or naïve – feminine even – limits not only academic discussion but the everyday observations of ordinary people. In a cultural climate in which beautiful is downplayed as trivial, the experiences and judgments of beauty in one’s life receive a “not-so-significant” label.

In addition to the gendered notion of beauty, another reason to keep gender under consideration in this research is that research of life in Lapland (or “the North” more globally) is gendered and biased. Concentrating on history, on indigenous peoples and on nature-based livelihoods, research literature depicts the lives of men. The daily activities of women in the North, especially if they are not of Sami origin, are underrepresented in research (Storm 2007, see also Naskali *et al.* 2003). When women make it to research designs, their lives often appear as

contrasted with those of men: women leave, whereas men stay, drink and commit suicide (e.g., Rasmussen 2007).

The agency of women living in Finnish Lapland has been addressed by Seija Keskitalo-Foley (2004). Through biographical research Keskitalo-Foley has approached the lives of women in the rural North as constructed out of a limited set of options. This outlook of activity of the women in the North complements the approach of this research – women are creative agents, producing spaces for acting and taking responsibility of their own wellbeing. The four participants of this research do not, however, express their lives as lacking in options. Rather, the abundance of things to engage with accounted in the letters has made me introduce a notion of qualitative plurality to the scope of building blocks for one's everyday life: the number of blocks is not limited for the women of the rural North. There are just different kinds of blocks available.

In concentrating on the various ways that beauty is present in their everyday lives, the four women seem to emphasize the abundance of meaningful relations and, quite concretely, the multitude of things to do and engage with. The possible lack or limited array of options does not make it to their letters. From the viewpoint of perceived wellbeing, I am inclined to argue that there is no binary opposition between southern/urban and northern/rural areas. Dwellers of the North are not necessarily lacking in of the things that those of the South have more of. The amount of shops, banks or jobs seem to be if not irrelevant; at least they are not portrayed as the most central aspects for perceived wellbeing. The abundance of the North is of a different quality and manifests most clearly in people's relations to their environments. This is discussed further in chapters 4.1 and 5.2 in connection with the results and discussion.

2.3 Environment

The four participants of this research wrote extensively about nature. They wrote about looking at it, walking in it, sensing it and engaging with it. They explicitly wrote about themselves as people for whom the surrounding nature means a lot. Thinking that this would be too obvious a result for this research, I tried to read complicated, sophisticated things into it. I, nevertheless, kept coming back to the finding that, quite simply, the age-old question of one's relation to her surrounding environment – an ability to form and develop a relation – is of key importance to the participants. In resigning to this result that at the time felt disappointing, if not trivial, I started to reread the letters from the frame of

relating to the environment. Four ways to account for a relation started to form. I took to discussing two of them in depth in article IV and I began to see individually meaningful ways of relating to one's human and non-human environment. It was through this viewpoint that I could challenge, in article IV, the idea that anthropocentrism, or anthropomorphism in particular, expressed communicatively, is necessarily a detrimental viewpoint to nature.

In this research, the concept of "environment" is applied as central instead of the other plausible options of "nature," "surroundings," and "place." In defining environment as separate from "nature," I align with Tim Ingold (e.g., 2003) as well as Yrjö Haila and Ville Lähde (2003). Environment is to be taken as that which refers to the entity of all that surrounds us. It includes an experiencing individual in concrete and abstract, natural and phenomenological ways and especially as experienced and made meaningful by that individual in her everyday life. Environment is an essentially anthropocentric concept, whereas "nature" is omnipresent and exceeds the experiential reach of any one individual, necessarily including that individual as well.

Rather than "surroundings" or "place," the choice to use "environment" stems from the data. In referring to their everyday-life context, the participants write of many things: nature, built environment, geographical location, cultural-historical and political location, artifacts, memories and impressions of various places. This plurality is best contained within the concept of environment, as its definition focuses on the perceiving individual rather than the object being perceived. A host of related concepts do appear in the original articles, among them surroundings and place. The use of these is to be taken as elaboration of the overarching concept of environment.

In this research, environment (singular) refers to the experienced context of one individual. Environments (plural) refer to the contexts of two or more individuals experienced subjectively as essentially different, even if objectively one and the same environment. As a researcher well versed in environmental ethics, I instinctively resisted the idea of holding a human being in the center of this research. I had hoped to speak from a biocentric view of nature (e.g., Desjardins 2006: 125–147) rather than an anthropocentric view of environment. A relieving insight was the discussion pertaining to environmental education and environmental ethics that suggested that human consciousness cannot be but anthropocentric and that accepting this does not have to lead to the application of anthropocentrism as the basis of value judgments (Bonnett 2006, Turner 2009).

And quite obviously, research on beauty as an expression in human language cannot be anything but anthropocentric.

Anthropocentrism is to be understood in this research as an approach to understanding accounts of an individual human being's relation to all that is not her (Article IV). This approach is taken for methodological as much as theoretical reasons. It is also an approach influenced by the gathered data. Methodologically, the anthropocentric choice of "environment" manifests in this research as an empirical approach to everyday life through particular people's meaning-making. The need for approaching everyday life empirically is often felt (e.g., Jokinen 2005, Tuomi-Gröhn 2008) but the subsequent attention is often limited to emerging social relations. Human-environment relations have, for a long time, stayed only in the interest of specialized groups of environmental or rural education, only recently beginning to be considered in education at large (place-based education e.g., Gruenewald 2003, 2005).

Theoretically, the choice of "environment" also manifests as a firm connection to human geography, a discipline essentially anthropocentric in approach. The central notions pertinent to human geography are those of space and place. The two are often distinguished from each other by portraying place as essentially familiar and personally experienced as opposed to spaces, which are more neutral. The distinction is best approached through the idea that spaces necessarily become places once you spend enough time in them, once you endow them with values (Tuan 1977, see also Cresswell 2004 and Karjalainen e.g., 1999). Places are seen to occur at levels of identity having to do with rituals, routines, other people, personal experiences, care and concern as well as landscapes, settings and locations (Relph 1976: 29). Between space and place, this research deals with places. In the central concept of "environment" in this research, the human geographical notion of "place" resides as an influential core: "place is a qualitative phenomenon grounded in the act of referencing and born out of a living context" (Karjalainen 1999: 2). The reason why environment is used as the overarching concept instead of place has to do with the multidisciplinary approach of this research. For instance, in the established fields of environmental aesthetics and environmental ethics to which this research also ventures, the notion of place does not fare as well as environment when including nature in the discussions. Also of influence is the inkling of connections that this research begins to suggest towards ecology, ecological aesthetics and environmental literacy in particular (article IV).

Ecologists prove to us that the natural environment is ever changing and chaotic, evolving without preference or direction (Gross 2003). However, in the daily lives of individual people, it is environment that seems to provide sources of continuity and stability (article II). In the perspective of an individual's life-span, the environment does seem stable. The seasons change, the sun and the moon do what they "are supposed to" and the migrating birds arrive on time. The bigger picture reveals that even the seasons and the migrating patterns have started to change due to human action, but the scale of everyday experience is still somewhat reassuring (see also Karjalainen 2006). People reflect on their own everyday lives against the seeming uniformity of natural phenomena (articles II and III.)

The focus on human-environment relations that this research yields is significant in the field of education. A view according to which one learns from dialogical engagement with non-human environment (Ingold 2007, 14, also 2000 and Ingold & Kurttila 2000) has not homed in on educational theories in which a pedagogical relationship is by definition one between humans (e.g., Wulf 2003). In a manner related to this research, human relations to nature have been approached in environmental aesthetics (e.g., Berleant & Carlson 2007) and human geography (e.g., Mäntysalo 2004). The novelty in the design of this research is the attempt to approach particular people's aesthetic engaging with their everyday environments *empirically*.

3 Research process

3.1 Methodological choices

Beauty always takes place in the particular (Scarry 2006: 18).

The scope of this research is novel and broad. The combination of everyday-life aesthetics and education outside of institutional art education is rare both in theoretical and empirical research. This research is thus, if not groundbreaking, at least path-opening in that much is applied and tried without a sound history of past research on the very same topic. Because of this, the methodological choices are kept straightforward and tailored site-specifically. The underlying methodological approach of this research is phenomenological-hermeneutical (i.e. interpretivist as in Koro-Ljungberg *et al.* 2009), understood here simply as suggesting the characteristics of qualitative research in general: the attention to and interpretation of experienced and reflected phenomena. The methods of data collection and analysis seek to remain simple enough to function as a base for further research.

There are three decided emphases that have directed and shaped the methodology of this research the most: 1) particularity, 2) process, and 3) representation. The origins and grounds for these three emphases are discussed in the earlier chapters pertaining to the theoretical framework: ways of defining the core areas of this research. This subchapter outlines the three main methodological decision junctures with the adjacent repercussions to specific methods respectively. These choices were not all made in the beginning of the research process. Rather, they have taken form as the research has progressed and focused inductively through the cumulating data.

From the onset, this research has concentrated on the particular and relied on the first-hand experiences and meanings given by local, so-called lay people. In doing so, I have followed the move that has been made away from the grand ideas of the Enlightenment belief in science as elevated and universal, and toward the approaching of everyday lives and understandings of lay people as also significant (Rustin 2000, Taylor 1998: 211–218).¹⁷ The first methodological

¹⁷ The turn to biographical methods in social sciences relates to modern theories of individualization (e.g., Beck 1992, Giddens 1991) and commonly receives either critical and/or pessimistic comments or optimism in the promise of emancipation as a result of increasing reflexivity over processes in everyday life (Rustin 2000). As suggested earlier in this summary, the emphasis of this research on the particular does not seek to dismiss the significance of social phenomena and structures on individual

choice was to embrace particularity through qualitative in-depth research of everyday lives as a phenomenon conceived of by the participants. The decision to leave the concepts of everyday life and beauty open and broad in the beginning of data collection aimed at data in which the participants would be able to express their particular perceptions and accounts diversely. This manifested in the data collection method of correspondence as being thematically unstructured and virtually free in form (article I). It also received attention in the analysis of data as individual accounts are read in the context of the relevant particular lives (article II) and in the context of the particular environment (article IV).

The second approach with repercussions to methods was to perceive everyday life as well as the phenomenon of attending to beauty as processes. Defining beauty as a process of seeking a linguistic counterpart of a positively experienced relation between oneself and certain element(s) in one's everyday-life environment, the empirical research of it becomes one of tracing particular relations. These relations evolve and unfold in time. If beauty is an elusive concept in everyday life, it is even more so in empirical research (article II in particular). A definition of beauty, urges Santayana (1955: 11–12), must include nothing less than “the exposition of the origin, place and elements of beauty as an object of human experience....” He goes on to note that to learn from where, when and how beauty appears is a task that cannot be but imperfectly accomplished.

Santayana's sentiments were shared by the participants of this research, who conclude in their final letters that as interesting and profound as the correspondence has been, the notion of beauty is still as open for them as in the beginning. To research an open-ended process is to choose methods that respect continuity and integrity. The crafting of this kind of method of data collection, correspondence, is discussed in detail in article I. The writing of letters for a relatively long period proved successful in illuminating the reiterative nature of attending to beauty in everyday life. In reading the data, the integrity of a process was noted in ways of reading that resisted fragmenting the data (Lee & Fielding 2004). The reading of data is described in detail in the following subchapter 3.3.

lives. Rather, the discussion of this research begins considering the interface of what is particular and what is shared: how are particular everyday lives negotiated in the midst of other lives and non-human environment? This is begun in article IV, developed a little further in this summary and most pertinently to be understood as a fruitful line of further inquiry (see chapters 4.3 and 5.3).

The third approach, identified as representation, has to do with the chosen focus of research to representations of experiences rather than experiences per se. In line with the chosen theoretical approach of holding beauty as a linguistic expression in categorizing a non-linguistic experience, the focus of attention is on the expression. Methodologically, this choice has to do with the interpretation of one's own or of others' experiences and accounts in order to facilitate understanding¹⁸ (e.g., Gadamer 1994, Guba & Lincoln 1998, see also Debesay *et al.* 2007). The method of data collection, correspondence, entailed transcribing subjective experiences and conceptions into writing. A sense of shared perspective was needed in order to convey accounts in a meaningful way: to make sense of your own evolving thoughts, to be understood and to understand the others' thoughts in their letters.

The intertwining of theory and methods is evident here and the significance of this crafted approach received further light only retrospectively. The decision to arrange the correspondence in such a way that everyone read all of each other's letters increased the motivation to keep writing. It, however, proved to yield more than motivation: it offered insights into the significance of sharing positive aesthetic experiences (see chapter 4.3 and also Rautio & Karjalainen forthcoming).

3.2 The year of writing and talking

The data of this research consists of 10 interviews or talks and 44 letters. Each participant was interviewed individually before the correspondence was begun and after the year had passed by. As a group, we met before beginning the correspondence and after the last letters had been exchanged. I will elaborate on the collecting of data, as it has not been discussed in any of the articles in its totality (article I discusses the core data: letters and the correspondence process). The letters of the correspondence form the core data of this research. They are the only part of the data that is systematically analyzed and thus pertain to the results of this study. The interviews conducted had various other functions, which I will discuss in detail here.

¹⁸ This research falls to the post-Gadamerian hermeneutics as applied in empirical research in that interpretation of experiences is seen to aim at comprehension of oneself and the world (Wulf 2003:26-27).

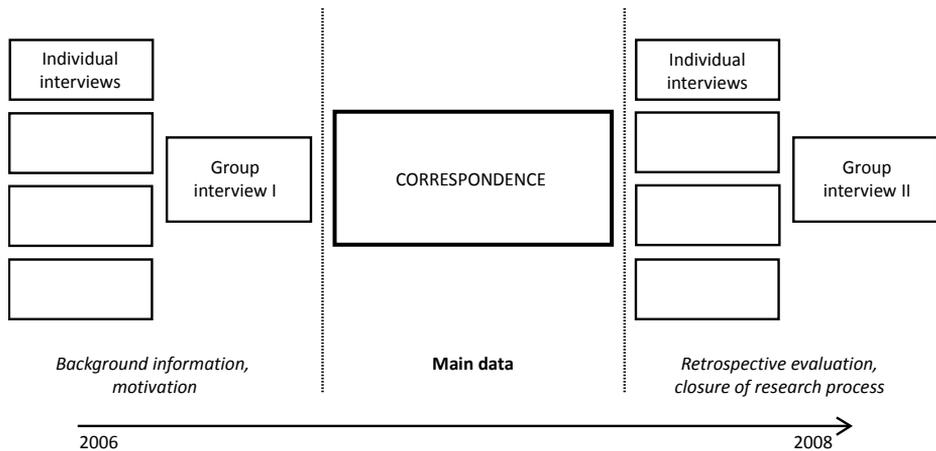


Fig. 1. Producing the data.

The initial interviews conducted with each of the four participants were biographical or so-called life story interviews (Atkinson 1998, 2007, also as in Jones & Rupp 2000, Middleton & Hewitt 2000, see also Freeman 2007), which were collected as part of our larger research project *Life in Place* in 2006–2007. The narrative approach to research, prevalent in our group, shows up in the interviews in the form of instructions given (i.e., “*Tell me about your life.*” “*Are there any more stories about that...?*”) in the unstructured way of seeing through the interviews without rigid themes and in the interviewer’s chosen position as a co-constructor of knowledge (Craig & Huber 2007). All of the initial individual interviews were conducted by another member of our group than me. The function of these interviews for this research is to provide supplementary information of the participants’ background and life situation as accounted by them on the eve of the correspondence year. The interview transcripts provided a reference frame for the emerging interpretations based on the letters (see especially article II).

The next phase was meeting as a group in January 2007. In this meeting, lasting about two hours, the form was that of an unstructured conversation over tea. We agreed on the mode of correspondence and talked about our lives and of beauty. The main objective and function of this meeting was to involve the participants in designing the correspondence year, inform them of my research intents, achieve research permits and motivate them individually and as a group. I took a considerable risk in starting out with only four participants who would need to participate for the entire year. Were I to lose just one or two of them

during the course of the year, the research design would suffer a considerable blow. Realizing this from the onset, I saw the necessity to pay attention to the research design, so as to make it as motivating for the participants as it could be. Their suggestion to arrange the correspondence so that each of us could read everyone's letters proved to be one of the main contributors to the strong motivation that kept the group together for the entire year (see article I).

The correspondence took place from February 2007 to January 2008. The design, implementation and outcome of the correspondence are discussed in detail in article I. The instruction for the writing of letters was simply to consider what is beautiful in one's everyday life. The form of letters that the participants preferred was "old fashioned" paper letters posted via mail. The intervals that the letters were exchanged in were one per month. At the end of the year, 44 letters comprised the whole of the correspondence. Two participants skipped one summer month's writing and one participant left out two intervals.

I took part in the correspondence process and wrote letters on beauty in my everyday life in Oulu, some 350km south of Suvanto, but still in the relatively northern part of Finland. I wanted to do that which I was asking my participants to do. This decision was based on the novelty and thus on the lack of existing research of this type of data collection (article I). In retrospect, taking part in the writing of letters on everyday beauty greatly accelerated my research process pertaining to conceptual insights on both "everyday life" and "beauty." Within the scope of this research, for the sake of the specific place-bound arguments and objectives, I have, however, excluded my own letters from the data proper. The effect of my writing on that of the participants and thus to the data is discussed as part of the evaluation of this research (chapter 5.1).

The post-correspondence individual interviews took place before the final group meeting. They took the form of semi-structured thematic interviews in which I called for experiences, opinions and feelings pertaining to the correspondence year in retrospect. The function of these interviews was to bring personal closure to the active phase of the research project and to provide reflective accounts of participating in a research through the method of writing letters. As the method is underused and research literature of it is scarce, I aimed at gaining knowledge and understanding of its functioning from the participants' perspectives (article I).

The concluding group meeting took place right after the individual interviews in February 2008. This meeting was arranged as a thematic group interview but later continued as an informal gathering of friends. The motivation of this final

meeting was similar to that of the closing interviews: to provide space for ending a long process, offer possibilities of evaluating the correspondence, as a method and to start sketching the budding outcomes of the year. A shared feeling of joy over the year and sadness to see it end spoke for the motivating aspects of this kind of correspondence for the participants. A sense of having achieved something concrete, as I handed out bound copies of all the letters to each participant, was apparent. The two mothers decided to keep their copies for their children – as memoirs of who their mother had been and what life in their home village had once been like. A strong sense of togetherness was verbalized as having to do with the topic of this research – beauty being somehow universal and particular all at the same time (see also article I).

3.3 Reading of data

The reading, or analysis of the letters in this research, has been tracing rhythms, relating to compositions and attending to linear and cyclical layers. I have approached the letters as if they were visual or three dimensional. After all, writing is expressing your thoughts in an abstract way. It is not a big leap, yet is often neglected in scientific research to think of written data as comparable to visual data.¹⁹ As my academic background began in the field of art history, the primary way I have come to approach data to be understood or analyzed, is visual. I do not mean that I would look at the letters of this research as compositions of black marks on paper.²⁰ Rather, this shows up as in-depth attention to detail and an eye for the balance between the parts and the whole in interpreting.

The interpretive practices of qualitative research have been criticized for deconstructing subjects into their socially derived elements, that is, losing grasp of the very parts in seeking to understand them as part of the whole (Rustin 2000: 48). In this research, the accounts of individual participants are held as the starting point for inferences about the correspondence as a whole or the phenomenon of everyday life in the villages of the North. The function of particular accounts is seen not only as contributing toward general insights, but as providing rich and diverse examples of possible lives per se, as if contributing to

¹⁹ Although it is fairly established to think of it vice-versa: Catherine Riessmann (2008: 142) writes “With the ‘narrative turn’ investigators are moving beyond realism and illustration as images become ‘texts’ to be read interpretatively (as written transcripts are).”

²⁰ Even if that is an existing and enticing approach to writing advocated quite matter of factly by e.g., Tonfoni (1994)

a “lexicon of representative lives” (ibid.). The particular accounts are thus treated as “thick information” (Geertz 1973), conveying a “thick sense” of the aesthetic (Carlson 2000: 57). Moreover, they hold value in their own right, rather than simply being a part of a whole: as if they were completed pieces of art.

I approach writing, as I would do a painting or a sculpture. I focus my attention on how and by whom the piece was produced, as well as on the different audiences receiving it. Attention to detail is further directed not just at what the piece shows, but also at what statement it makes (Riessman 2008: 142–144) and what its reference points are; to which discourses the piece owes its content and form. I begin by taking a broad look and then finding something that speaks to me, which I can relate to. This is often referred to with notions like “resonance” (Conle 2000) or “echo” and the researcher is seen to engage in the analysis of her field data in a very personal and attached way, using herself as the most crucial research tool (Conle 2005). In assigning myself to this position, I also acknowledge that, as with interpreting works of art, my interpretation is only one of many possible ones. The conclusions I draw from analyzing the data are systematic and theory-informed as well as backed up by quotes presented for the reader to judge. Nevertheless, they are inherently contestable.

There are two broad ways to organize the readings I have tackled the data with: by reading all of the letters at the same time or reading individual participants’ letters separately. I began with reading all of the letters as one complete correspondence aiming to address the first of my research questions: What is perceived beauty in everyday life led in a small northern village? This reading began with basic content analysis: an attempt to trace described sources of beauty in the letters. During this reading it became clear, however, that the participants were not describing aesthetic objects but complicated scenes and events in which a singular source of beauty was impossible to trace. As a result, the next round of reading was focused on outlining broader themes within which accounts of beauty were presented.

Four shared themes emerged: doings, surroundings, animals and time (article II). These themes were then read one at a time, focusing on clarifying the place – the location and function – that beauty held in these accounts. These shared themes were read through a collective frame, as if comprising a “metanarrative” of a group, identifying shared notions relative to the specific environment in question (Brice Heath & Street 2007: 8, article II). The four shared themes were also read in connection with the individual participants’ letters and in relation to each participant’s interviews.

SEIJA	ERJA	KAARINA	LAURA
<i>Chores, worrying, tending to</i>	<i>Making do, local knowledge</i>	<i>Peace and quiet, walks</i>	<i>Growing</i>
<i>Track of time, rhythms</i>	<i>All things alive, anthropomorphism</i>	<i>Social life</i>	<i>Windows, directions, existence in time and space</i>
<i>Animals as fellows</i>	<i>Being, existing, self in place, belonging</i>	<i>Doings with husband</i>	<i>Balance, harmony, holism</i>
			<i>Embodied existence, sense perceptions</i>

Fig. 2. Themes / processes of individual participants.

The letters of each participant separately comprised the latter part of the data analysis. Individual sets of letters were read, specifically but not solely, in order to address the second research question: What is the significance, if any, of considering beauty in everyday life? To answer this question, the letters were read looking for 1) recurring themes and then 2) a temporal and spatial evolving of accounts over the year considering 3) the performative aspects of letters as written communications. Having said this, however, the word “theme” in the analysis of the data of this research is somewhat misleading. I will briefly discuss this before presenting an overall image and an individual example of how the reading of data commenced and was interpreted into insights.

As I found that that tracing of any single objects of beauty in the letters would not work, the tracing of themes was an act of broadening the scope of reading. I moved from looking at single entries or chapters in letters to reading letters as a whole and as sequential. This revealed a more meandering, contextual, relative and reiterative structure of beauty. I began to approach beauty as an iterative linguistic process rather than as sets of fixed objects or even themes. Thus the word “theme” and “thematic” analysis in this research means tracing of the various kinds of processes that intertwine and overlap as well as evolve. As experienced and accounted in writing, beauty is not an adjective describing things that can be thematised. Rather, beauty is a process of relating per se. This is addressed both in content and form in article III.

I will clarify the analysis of individual letters through an example, albeit necessarily a very narrow and simplified one within the scope of this summary.

Within a broad shared theme of “animals,” Seija presents a recurring subtheme in her letters: descriptive accounts of non-human animals she encounters and observes. She has a unique way of describing animals that in its simplicity and lack of weight in expression runs the risk of going unnoticed (see article IV). The parts of Seija’s letters in which she writes about animals underwent three kinds of readings as indicated above: temporal, spatial and performative. After this, I began to understand the significance of the ease in her expression as conveying an established way of being rather than a conscious endeavor of giving an account.²¹

Here is a brief example from one of Seija’s letters illustrating her theme or process of habitually observing non-human animals:

“Two swans flew low, at the height of chimneys almost. They flew a circle and then headed back the same direction they came from. Capercaillies I’ve seen often by the road. Frogs have been on the road. In early May I spotted a wagtail. May Day passed without celebrations. My cactus is blooming with red flowers and the China rose has one open blossom.”

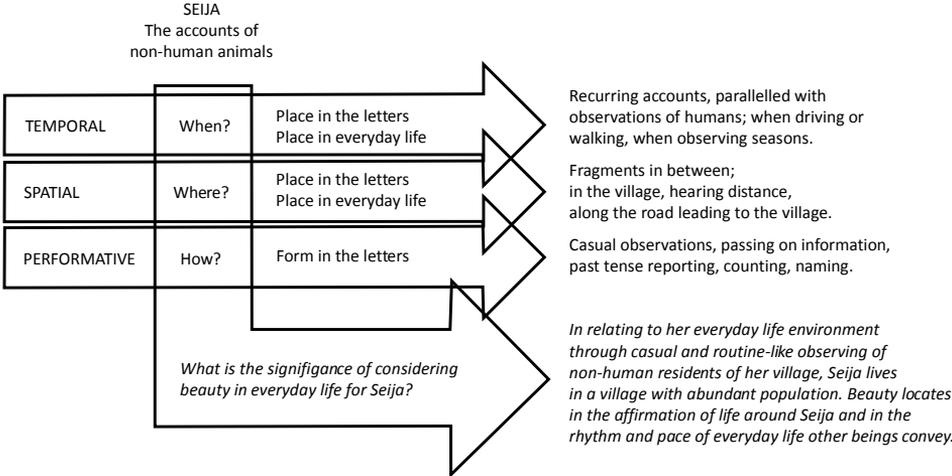


Fig. 3. The reading of a selected theme / process of one participant.

²¹ Writing about non-human animals was only one of many themes in Seija’s letters. All recurring themes underwent the same rounds of readings as the accounts of non-human animals presented as an example here. The insights of all of these readings then contributed towards answering the overall question of the significance of considering beauty in everyday life, both for Seija and in general for all of the participants.

The results that began to take shape after reading everyone's letters and then the individual participants' letters evolved interchangeably: the insights from the whole correspondence shed light on individual accounts and the variety of individual accounts further elaborated the shared aspects. The shared theme of animals received focus from especially Seija's and Erja's individual accounts (article IV). Accounts of animals in relation to perceived beauty received an existentially locative interpretation (see more in chapter 4.1). Relating to your everyday-life environment through other beings than fellow humans endows diversity of life around you and highlights the interdependency of all life rather than the lonesome rule of humans over all other life (article IV).

In reading the data, I have traversed many levels and traced iterative cycles to be able to make interpretations of these letters as presentations of everyday life. The difference between this approach and the analysis of an art historian or an art critic is, perhaps, that I am not passing judgments on the quality or poignancy of presentations. Nor am I interpreting pieces of art by artists. In relating to art history, I am instead stressing the word "historian," dwelling on details and interpretation based on variable and longitudinal data. I move back and forth between January and December letters, the pre- and the post-interviews as well as back and forth between relevant concepts inductively. There are only four participants in this research for a reason. Each has been interviewed four times, twice individually and twice together with the others. Each has spent a year reflecting on the given instruction in writing, producing some 11 letters of two to six sheets in length. I have, in turn, spent two years reading the interview transcripts and the letters, synchronically and diachronically – as an entity and as four individual sets of letters. Had there been any more participants, the process would have lost either detail or economy.

4 Results

4.1 Of what kind is beauty in everyday life?

One of the first insights obtained from the data of this research has been that beauty is something we engage with rather than stumble upon. As the letters cumulated and the analysis of data progressed the description of beauty in everyday life as a) relational and b) active or activating started to emerge. In this chapter I will summarize and draw together the main results that can also be found in more detail in the original articles.

Beauty in everyday life is relational. In beginning this research I had expected my instruction to writing: “What is beautiful in your everyday life?” to result to mostly lists of objects encountered or lists of experiences underwent that I could then thematically ascribe to detailed categories. I expected the accounts of beautiful objects and events to be relative to each participant and thus vary from one person to the other but show consistency and be discernible within the letters of one individual. What I soon learnt however was that beauty appeared in complex and thoroughly relational ways in the letters. Hardly any single objects or clear-cut events were recalled as beautiful. Mostly beauty appeared entangled in occasions with countless relations back and forth in time and space, between people and fuelled by various sense perceptions.

The participants wrote and said in interviews they found it hard to pinpoint exactly what was beautiful in the instances they wrote about. Exemplifying this and characteristic about beauty in everyday life as expressed in the letters was the amount of details presented. In realizing that beauty appears where there prevail strong and richly detailed relations to surroundings I concluded that beauty is locative (articles II and III).

Beauty in everyday life pertains to enjoying the experience of lateralness: that you're not the centre of everything. The ideas of Elaine Scarry (2006: 113–114) receive affirmation through this research: beauty is decentering, it lets us be simultaneously adjacent and feel extreme pleasure. Relations of beauty are those that posit us as lateral figures rather than heroines in our lives (articles II and III). Beauty in everyday life is locative through affirming the existential, spatial-temporal, relations we find desirable and meaningful in our lives (article II).

<i>Locative existentially:</i> one's (right) place in the midst and in relation to other entities in existence	<i>Locative spatially:</i> stable elements in surroundings and locally habiting (or migrating) non-human beings
	<i>Locative temporally:</i> passage of time, elements or events that locate one in the flow of time, continuity

Fig. 4. Beauty as locative.

Beauty in everyday life appears as if it were a junction, a condensation of significant relations the perceiving individual holds. As beauty itself is taken as a linguistic expression of a relation, it can be taken to imply as if it were a meta-relation. We seem to call beautiful those instances that hold a condensation of variable significant relations. Where there is abundance in connecting us with our surroundings in a desirable way, there seems to be the linguistic label of beauty articulating this felt condensation. David Feeney (2008) in discussing aesthetic experiences uses the notion “continuity with the world.” That aptly describes how beauty appears in this research: it provides us with continuity with the world; a sense of belonging to the world in a lateral, continual, almost organic way, rather than positing us higher or somehow separate.

But William James (1890/1981: 246–7, also in Shusterman 2010: 41) perhaps makes the most eloquent statement in attempting to answer what our aesthetic experience and judgment are: “the halo of felt relations.” In writing about everyday life, beauty indeed seems to be a linguistic construction to grasp the evanescent halo of felt relations.

Beauty in everyday life is active. Beauty in one’s everyday life seems to be coherent with the notion of everyday life as something we make rather than passively undergo. In spite of rendering the perceiving individual as if she were a lateral figure, beauty in everyday life is essentially not about disinterested and distanced observation. In environmental aesthetics, the relation between an individual and her everyday-life surroundings is, by definition, concrete and active (Berleant & Carlson 2007, Sepänmaa 1999), facilitating human attachment and belonging to a place through participation (von Bonsdorff 1999: 152). An aesthetic relation in everyday life is not passive; rather, it is well evident in the data of this research that it is built on the “dynamics of movement, pleasure in one’s own physicality, exertion and rest” (Sepänmaa 1999, 190, article II).

The accounts of beauty in the letters are often accounts of doing things: mending, making, ploughing, picking, driving and walking, to name but a few

verbs (article II). Beauty seems to be connected to instances of action in everyday life in which things happen as if effortlessly (article III). This ease implies a functioning fit between one's skills and the conditions of one's everyday life. Allen Carlson (2007) speaks of a functional fit in connection with evaluating elements in one's surroundings. In light of this research, being open to beauty in your life is also about evaluating the fit between yourself, your active engagement and the conditions and context in which you lead your life. It could be said that in considering beauty in everyday life, you evaluate your own life as an aesthetic project unfolding in a particular context. Beauty is active in that it is a reiterative process of seeking a fit.

4.2 What is the significance of considering beauty in everyday life?

We live our daily lives in a constant exchange with the set of daily appearances surrounding us – often they are very familiar, sometimes they are unexpected and new, but always they confirm us in our lives.

John Berger (2009: 9)

The participants of this research expressed both in letters and in the post-correspondence interviews that they felt they were doing something valuable and exploring something quite profound, although they could not quite grasp what it was they tapped into when writing about beauty (all of the original articles.) In line with the definition I have followed of everyday life and the scale I have set for the interest of this research, the significance of considering beauty in everyday life is not life-altering or even always detectable or definable. It is small steps that contribute towards a larger whole. The perceived significance of these small steps is to be caught in expressions of delight and enthusiasm over time that is felt to have been spent well. The considering of beauty in everyday life has been a rewarding experience for the participants, even in the absence of a concrete and exhaustive outcome. This satisfaction indicates both intrinsic and non-instrumental functional value in considering beauty: the topic or phenomenon of beauty seems to be rewarding in itself, and the process of considering beauty is felt as a worthwhile activity yielding a reiterative sense of relating, fitting and being in the right place for who you are.

Considering beauty in everyday life is active steering of life. In considering aspects of their everyday life as beautiful, the participants of this research were relanguaging their lives and environments, adding value to their lives, directing

their lives and regaining agency over defining their own wellbeing. I have begun to unravel how this steering happens in article III in particular. During the year of writing about beauty, the participants noticed their initial understanding of what was desirable and beautiful in their lives to have altered. They also realized they held agency in deciding what could be or become beautiful. They wrote about more and more things as potentially beautiful and were considering beauty decisively in places in which they would not expect to find it. Laura wrote of sticking her head inside a plastic bag filled with plant waste, going to a compost box and finding a world of surreal colours and shapes. She wrote with delight that her husband must have thought she had gone mad seeing her like that, with her head in a bag.

For Laura, the seeking of beauty was about being open to noticing and anticipating changes. It was as if mapping the relations she held to her environment; relations that carried her in the midst of everyday life bustling. She perceived this seeking to be liberating, allowing her at times to engage in irrational things, to play, in order to find and make meaningful relations, beauty. Other participants took to playing as well, with other animals, children, racing against the wind on a bike or imagining people as funnily shaped carrots. In a book review, Joe Winston (2009) writes of a “promise of beauty” in a way that fits the accounts in this research. The participants of this research came to treat their everyday lives as scenes of potential beauty, as entailing promises that would only realize with effort from themselves.

Creative agency or everyday aesthetic agency is a concept with which the significance of beauty in steering one’s life can be approached (see article IV). The moving or changing is minute but the direction is always set to positive. Tending to one’s environment aesthetically is tending to the quality and direction of one’s everyday life. It is about developing a skill of discriminating and cultivating what is desirable in your life and, in doing so, inherently coming to cultivate the desirable in other lives as well: through the realization of it being relations and interrelatedness with others that are in the core of perceived beauty. In the words of William James (1899/2009: 5, 10), whom I take to mean with “an eagerness” much the same as I do with “creative agency”:

“Wherever a process of life communicates an eagerness to him who lives it, there the life becomes genuinely significant. Sometimes the eagerness is more knit up with the motor activities, sometimes with the perceptions, sometimes with the imagination, sometimes with reflective thought. But, wherever it is

found, there is the zest, the tingle, the excitement of reality; and there is 'importance' in the only real and positive sense in which importance ever anywhere can be [...] The inner life beyond us, so different from that of outer seeming, illuminate our mind. Then the whole scheme of our customary values gets confounded, then our self is riven and its narrow interest fly to pieces, then a new center and a new perspective must be found."

Along the lines of James, Elaine Scarry (2006: 109–124) writes of beautiful things as if lifting us high above our normal concerns and customary values and making us necessarily land elsewhere, in a different relation to the world than that with which we took up. Scarry calls this “radical decentering” and sees it functioning at the core of social justice. I have looked at the significance of beauty’s decentering as inherently to do with growing (article III).

Considering beauty in everyday life is attending to diversity and interdependence of all life. So far, we have come to take the considering of beauty as an active process of relating and one with which we can creatively steer our lives, with the help of which we can grow. This last summing up of results suggests that considering beauty is significant, not only for the wellbeing and quality of life of the perceiving human individual, but also for societies and nature at large. Again, it is a rather big statement to make with data from the everyday lives of four individuals. This result is to be taken as a well-grounded suggestion and to resonate with existing thought on the significance of aesthetic attachment and attending to one’s surroundings (e.g., Berleant 2010, Irvin 2008, Passmore 1974, Saito 2007, Scarry 2006, Sepänmaa e.g., 1999).

Arnold Berleant (2008) calls aesthetic deprivation losing one’s ability to perceive beautiful things, the inability to aesthetise your life or aspects of it, and sees it as leading to aesthetic damages. Jonathan Passmore (1974) famously defends beauty and sensuousness, stating that only if men can first learn to look sensuously at the world will they then learn to care for it. There is ongoing concern over the deadening of our senses (Berleant 2008, Irvin 2008, Passmore 1974, Sennett 1990) advocating us to start trusting in our senses again, in our aesthetic intuitions and relations to the world. Berleant speaks of an *ability* that can be lost, Passmore of something that can be *learnt* and Sherri Irvin about an aesthetic character in everyday life that we need to *attend to*. The damage that is feared is, in my conclusion, losing touch with what is good enough. Should we lose our ability to see worth in everyday life and attend to its aesthetic texture, which is inherently pleasing and already present, we would be in danger of basing

our wellbeing and quality of life on perceived lack and need. To lead an everyday life based on need is to live unsatisfied and to seek more and more: things, resources, experiences, and acquaintances. To attend to beauty is to discover and cultivate the rich textures of life that already endow plenty of beauty and worth to our everyday lives. It is to lead a good enough life.

This research has been an attempt to fight the deadening of our senses in order to see what happens when we set aside time to consider beauty. A time frame of only a year has proved to the participants that they can indeed develop an ability, that being to learn to attend to beauty, to sense perceptions that convey positive relations to their surroundings. In doing this, they have written letters filled with observations of interconnectedness. Existential wonderings about time and space with themselves as simultaneously the center and the marginal speck; the passing of generations and cycles of seasons as well as the existence of other beings as fellow dwellers (articles II and IV). The 44 letters convey a year of four individual everyday lives that are rich and diverse to the extent that the participants seemed surprised after the year had passed: Had all this really happened? They felt their letters conveyed well the quality of their lives in Suvanto, as explicated in their wish to save their copies of the correspondence for their children.

The by now classic sociologists of the modern age, Anthony Giddens (1991) and Ulrich Beck (1992), reflect on the general discourse prevalent at the turn of the millennium: the detachment of people from traditions and communities. The modern project of an individual to be the author of her life independent of material constraints is a (Western) phenomenon overarching fields and disciplines (e.g., Taylor 1989). If we believe that these lines of thought characterize even generally the time and society we live in, then the skills of experiencing, creating and maintaining aesthetic relations to significant places, to everyday-life environments are indeed in danger of being lost if not explicated.

4.3 What kind of data does correspondence yield?

The third research question I have proposed is methodological, pertaining to a particular method of data collection in qualitative research. The reason for addressing this method lies in the relative lack of research literature available. Many adjacent methods such as journal writing or writing single letters have received interest. I argue, however, in article I, that correspondence – the reciprocal exchange of letters for a period of time – is an independent method,

producing original data that differs from say, journal entries. Correspondence holds three unique characteristics: invisibility, time and tangibility, all of which contribute to the research of experienced everyday life. As this argument is presented, discussed and grounded in article I, I will not go further into it here. Rather, I aim to complement the original article by briefly and open-endedly discussing corresponding as an act on a more abstract level: What is being done when subjective aesthetic sense perceptions are shared? (See also Rautio & Karjalainen forthcoming.)

Wittgenstein (1966, 1) points out that looking at how “beautiful” is used in a sentence confuses us because it seems to be an adjective, an expression of a certain quality in an object. To rethink the use of “beautiful,” he urges us to think of how the word was taught to us. “Beautiful” is taught as a substitute for a facial expression or of a gesture and exclaimed with a tone of voice that suggests approval. Aesthetic judgment is thus not solely a quality of an object but has to do with expressing approval, assessing a fit and ascribing a correctness of some kind.

But passing on judgments itself bears significance beyond explicating a sense perception deemed desirable. In saying, “I heard a beautiful sound of waves,” I am not merely passing on a judgment, telling you that I approve of the sound of waves. Rather, I am asking you to consider me as a person who has experienced the sound of waves as beautiful. I am asking for you to approve of my approval. I ask to fit in and belong in all that we share. I ask to be seen for who I am through sharing a subjective experience via the shared language we have.

The weight, that sharing aesthetic judgments bears, is implied in that doing, and so is limited to occasions that seem appropriate. I do not just express to anyone any time that I have found something beautiful. It feels almost too personal or at least irrational should it take place, say, in passing someone going up an escalator. Even with a good friend sitting on the docks on a summer evening, the situation might feel off or the sharing of an aesthetic perception irrelevant on the whole. The sharing then seems to be appropriate for some occasions for certain reasons. It is as if rules were implied through this observation. In line with Wittgenstein’s reasoning, a linguistic game of sharing sense perceptions and aesthetic judgments seems to exist. This observation entails a fruitful and enticing line of inquiry to probing the rules and limits of such a language game in everyday life. In the scope of this research, this is not attempted. I have, however, begun to sketch such a game elsewhere (Feeney & Rautio, forthcoming, Rautio & Karjalainen, forthcoming).

In any case, writing letters about beauty seems to be included in the implied language game as an appropriate venue for sharing aesthetic judgments. In this venue, the writing has the role of answering a question. I have asked the participants to share their aesthetic judgments. They reply in writing. Nevertheless, mere asking does not create an appropriate situation for sharing aesthetic judgments. Take the previous example of passing someone going up an escalator. If either of the people were to propose a question to the other such as, “Do you find this beautiful?” or more generally, “What is beautiful to you?” the mere asking would not create a situation appropriate for the two of you to start sharing aesthetic judgments. But should the other person, for some reason, agree to see relevance in the question posed on an escalator, an appropriate situation would arise.

There seems to be something distinctive in it being an aesthetic judgment instead of any other question. Someone could stop you at the top of the escalator to ask you to answer a questionnaire. You could tell you salary or state an opinion on the level of income tax with ease. The interest paid to you by the person asking would focus on what you say as representing a more general climate. The interest paid by you to the person asking would be equally mechanical: he would be the vehicle through whom you would get your voice heard. But in asking about and answering about beauty, the interest is always more profound and personal since it focuses on what kind of a person you are, what you desire and value.

It is as if an appropriate situation for sharing aesthetic judgments takes shape as a mutual endeavor and has to hold a promise of engagement. For sharing aesthetic judgments is essentially not just about talking or listening, writing or reading. In agreeing to listen to an aesthetic judgment, you agree to not only listen but to respond in an equally subjective and personal way, to engage in an exchange; you agree to be open to change yourself. Take a scene at my hairdresser’s I witnessed not long ago in which the hairdresser greets a new client while helping her with her coat:

Hairdresser: *“Isn’t the weather lovely?”*

Client: *“Yes, it is really beautiful!”*

In what might seem as meaningless small-talk I recognized a perfect illustration of a language game appropriate for going to the hairdresser’s and of sharing aesthetic judgments. The word the hairdresser used in beginning conversing with his client was “ihana” (transl. “lovely”). The reply he got was an affirmation of

what he had said but with the word “kaunis” (transl. “beautiful”). Thus it seems as if this scene could be read as the hairdresser cautiously enquiring whether and at which depth the client felt it appropriate to hold a conversation during their appointment. The word “ihana” is a light and cheerful expression that does not associate with deep convictions or well thought of judgments. In replying with the more profound “kaunis” the client as if answered the hairdresser’s enquiry and chose a level of conversing. In sharing aesthetic judgments it seems that the using of “beautiful”/“kaunis” needs affirmation and negotiation. It cannot be just jumped at in any situation.

The words, according to Wittgenstein (1966), with which we express aesthetic judgments, have rules of usage, depending on the appropriate culture. Rules as part of language games are negotiated and shared. In using words like “beautiful” one is taking part in defining a culture, in negotiating rules. Being skilled in judging, one can challenge, evaluate, assert or altogether abandon the prevalent culture through the use of words, of language. Thus, the use of sense perceptions expressed through language would be to express your position within your culture to others. Writing letters about beauty in everyday life is negotiation of the desirable, preservable and promotable.

5 Discussion

5.1 Evaluation of the research

This research is crafted from the first instance with an objective to shed light on a wide phenomenon from a multitude of perspectives. This approach is not monological disciplinarily, in theory or in regard to methods. Rather, the way to conceive of and evaluate what has been done is to look at this research as a bricolage (Kincheloe 2001, 2005): it is a purposeful compilation of diverse perspectives and methods. The phenomenon of everyday life in a northern village is approached through the disciplines of education, aesthetics, sociology and human geography as well as through environmental ethics. The theoretical and methodological frames have been built to complement the phenomenon and to resonate with the data. The successfulness of this research can be evaluated as the functioning of the bricolage: Does it aid in understanding or bring forth more ambiguity?

The objective of a bricoleur, a researcher engaged in a multiperspectival research project, is to address the complexity of discourses and positions through which the phenomenon in question can be understood. To be a bricoleur is to be a researcher permanently incapable of settling down to a discipline, a theory or a method. It is an existence in the margins of a disciplined world of science. I have found myself, unwillingly at first, to slide to these margins time and again. The phenomena of ordinary life that hold my interest are inherently undisciplined or multiperspectival. Until the summary of this thesis, I had adopted the position of a bricoleur as an unfortunate fate. However, it is through the summing up of this research project that I have begun to see worth in not being able to stick to a single discipline. To be a bricoleur is to seek questions rather than answers. It is to endure with open-ended and broad phenomena in an attempt to discover openings, fruitful lines of further, perhaps more disciplined discoveries. This kind of existence is not one without limitations, however. A bricoleur works with phenomena and perspectives so wide and consuming, both in time and cognitive capacity, that the breadth of her work is always at the cost of depth: in generating questions, there is no room for also answering all of them. A bricoleur's existence is vital among researchers but she is ill-equipped to work alone – as is any researcher.

Aside from multiperspectival bricolages, the field of qualitative research in education is diverse and rich in content in general. This yields research reports too often ambiguous and unclear (Koro-Ljungberg *et al.* 2009). Methodological transparency is often called for in order to strengthen the integrity of qualitative research in the current (North-American) academic climate of educational research, also referred to as “the methodology wars” (Bredo 2009, Koro-Ljungberg *et al.* 2009, see also Howe 2009, Moss *et al.* 2009, Tillman 2009). This debate is long-standing between qualitative and quantitative approaches to research. It receives a welcome comment from Bredo (2009: 447), who states that the only proper standard for educational research is that it should perform its function well: clear up ambiguities and open up fruitful lines of inquiry.

To evaluate the quality of qualitative research, a host of checklists and guidelines are available (e.g., Alvesson & Sköldbberg 2000, Bruscia 1998, Morse 2003). Some propose fixed checklists, others see these as problematic and offer pluralistic and flexible ones instead (Stige *et al.* 2009). Meta-level discussions that seek to compare and combine or make transparent different bases for evaluating quality offer evidence of the many sometimes contesting strands of qualitative research (e.g., Koro-Ljungberg *et al.* 2009, Moss *et al.* 2009; Stige *et al.* 2009). Some even propose that validity is a question related to power struggles and political dimensions of demarcation within science: Who gets to say what is “good” science? (Lather in Moss *et al.* 2009, 506.) For the purposes of both self-evaluation and making this summary evaluable, I have adapted and followed guidelines from three sources: decision junctures in Koro-Ljungberg *et al.* (2009), evaluation agenda in Stige *et al.* (2009) and the ethical notion of the tension involved in making generalizations in light of local variations as in Moss *et al.* (2009: 513, see also Karvonen 2007).

For the methodological transparency of this research design, the decision junctures proposed by Koro-Ljungberg *et al.* (2009) are deliberately presented with clarity throughout this summary, with reference to detailed discussion to be found in the original articles in question. These junctures and their location in this summary are: epistemology (chapter 2), purpose statements and research questions (chapter 1.3), sampling strategies (chapter 1.2), data collection methods (chapter 3.2), analysis methods (chapter 3.3), assessment of validity (chapter 5.1), knowledge producer (chapters 4.5 and 5.1), role of the researcher (chapters 1.3 and 5.1), and research’s relation to practice (chapter 5.3). That is, the research design is presented with sufficient clarity to yield ground for evaluation of rigor

and quality; evaluation of the rigor of execution and quality or significance of the scope and topic (Floden in Moss *et al.* 2009: 505).

In finding a strand of evaluating qualitative research that would accommodate this research and offer guidelines for validity, I have come across an evaluation agenda presented by Stige, Malterus and Midtgarten (2009). From their disciplinary perspective of health research, Stige *et al.* propose an agenda they name EPICURE that is flexible enough to be applied to this research and one that genuinely complements the objectives of this research, as it seeks to evaluate “the situated processes of developing rich and interpreted accounts or stories and to the capacity of these stories to facilitate change” (ibid.: 1507). The EPICURE agenda consists of evaluating engagement with a phenomenon or situation, processing of empirical material, interpretation of the evolving descriptions, as well as critique, usefulness, relevance, and ethics pertaining to preconditions and outcomes of research related to social situations and communities. I will briefly evaluate this research through selected elements of this agenda that I feel are still in need of reflection or that are not covered in the original articles, namely engagement of the researcher as it intertwines with interpretation.

My engagement with the phenomenon of everyday beauty and the situation of writing about it was thorough. I took part in the correspondence for the entire year. I have not included my own letters as the data in this research; rather, I have kept the letters to provide a conceptual research diary.²² It is clear, however, that my writing has been read by the participants and affected their subsequent writings (article I). In this case, the challenge of double or even triple interpretation arises (Stige *et al.* 2009: 1509): the participants interpret situations, yielding these interpretations to be interpreted by the researcher and, in this case, interpreting the researcher’s interpretations in their subsequent interpretations. An evolving construct of continuous iterative interpretation between participants and the researcher is formed. However, for the objective of this research, this double or triple hermeneutics does not propose a serious problem.

In considering beauty in your everyday life, the fact that others tell you what they find does not corrupt your experiences; rather, it contributes to the potential deepening and broadening of them. This was also expressed by the participants in post-correspondence interviews. That I took part in the correspondence, they claim and I contend, gave them a possibility to deepen their relating to what was

²² This is not to say that my letters would not make for interesting data for analyzing the conceptual development of a research project as well as focusing specifically on the engagement and role of a researcher in producing knowledge. In the scope of this research this is not attempted, however.

specific in their environment as reflected against where I was writing from. My role in the correspondence was to be “the urban one,” as one participant put it, and thus the outsider to whom perceived beauty in a remote village was presented. In fact, one of the conclusions of this research, presented in the previous chapter, is indeed the focus on the significance of *negotiating* a shared background on the basis of diverse subjective and local experiences.

Evaluation of qualitative research necessarily entails self-critique in relation to research processes and products (Stige *et al.* 2009). I will engage in discussing two of the most pertinent concerns I have: the compromised anonymity of the participants and the suitability of the data collection method for all of the participants. To conclude, I will address the ethical sustainability of the research topic and scope overall, specifically the tension in making generalizations in light of local variations (Moss *et al.* 2009: 513).

The participants are referred to by pseudonyms. However, the village in which they live is presented by its proper name. Being a village of only thirty inhabitants, this compromises the degree of anonymity pseudonyms can offer to the participants. I have made this clear to the participants in the beginning as well as during and after the correspondence. I have given them a chance to omit parts of their letters freely, should they decide at some point that they would not want to include something in my research data. None of them used this option. Rather, they all concluded that the topic of this research is such that they do not feel uneasy about being recognized. There are, however, remarks in the letters about some things that were perceived as beautiful but omitted because they were “too personal to write down.” I realize that both the compromised anonymity and the shared nature of our correspondence – each of the participants reading each others’ letters – affected the content of the letters even if the topic was inherently positive and easy to write about.

The realization that fellow villagers or people from nearby villages could identify the participants, might have affected the content of the writing towards being presentable and somewhat polished. This is not explicitly evident in the letters. They are, at times, unpolished and even unflattering. I have, however, taken this into consideration in analyzing the data. I have also read the accounts as performative, not just to the writer herself or me as a researcher but to a generalized reader, and one who might potentially identify the writer.

The data collection method worked well with most measures. It motivated the participants and was considered intrinsically rewarding (article I). It yielded rich and detailed, iterative accounts that helped in focusing, describing and further

understanding the phenomena under research. There was and is, however, one downfall: writing is not the optimal way to account for everyday life for all. For one of the participants, the writing of letters did not seem easy nor did her letters convey accounts that were as in-depth as those of the others. This participant was Kaarina, the oldest participant.

Kaarina seemed to keep on writing only because she had promised to do so. She said in a post-correspondence interview that she mostly enjoyed reading what others had written but did not find it easy to write. It was clearly not the most optimal way for her to produce accounts. The times I sat with her in her living room, chatting away were more productive, especially after we got to know each other. In retrospect, I attribute the modest outcome of Kaarina's writing to her age.²³ She was the only one not competent in typing her letters with a computer but kept to writing with pen and paper, an effort which she said was time-consuming for her. Also, she expressed a wish to converse with people face-to-face rather than having "time for herself," which was something the other participants praised. Age or phase of life had not occurred to me as significant in designing the data collection for this research. In retrospect, I would have considered an alternative mode for Kaarina. I could have had someone in the village go over to her to talk about beauty once a month in the same way the others were writing about it, and I could have then transcribed the recordings. This modification would have tampered with the clear-cut method of correspondence but would have addressed Kaarina's preferred way of accounting better.

It needs to be noted however, that an initial aversion or hesitance to writing does not necessarily signal incompatibility of the method with a person. Unfamiliarity with writing letters and writing in general also made another participant, Seija, hesitant at the beginning of the correspondence. Seija, however, soon found joy in writing, as she said in an interview, and accordingly, her letters evolved into lengthy detailed accounts as the year progressed (article I).

As to the overall choice of topic and approach of this research, I recognize potential pitfalls and aim to counter them here. In concentrating on something as positive as perceived beauty, there is a danger of appearing to romanticize life in the rural North. In claiming that there is beauty in surviving the harsh conditions

²³ By a modest outcome I mean the length and depth of her letters, not the content. The things she did write about were by no means modest but significant and contributed towards the results of this research as did the others' letters. It was clear from the curt expressions however – knowing how expressive Kaarina is in talking – that she was not comfortable with writing.

and challenges of everyday life in the North, I could perpetuate the lack of development and constructive political attention to the North. In other words, if they enjoy their misery, why bother making things better for them? To avoid this line of reasoning, I wish to stress that this research is built theoretically, methodologically, and ethically around the notion “perceived.” That is, I concentrate on how the people of the rural North *themselves romanticize* their everyday lives to the extent that they see fit, to the extent that they find it significant for their own well-being.

The underlying assumption is that it is possible to attend to beauty in your life regardless of where, when and how you lead it. One of the conclusions of this research, that surviving or making do is considered beautiful, thus does not indicate that the things being survived from would be valued per se but that there is beauty in the wider phenomenon of surviving or making do. In other words, given the chance, the attending to beauty in everyday life highlights desirable aspects even in the predominantly negative. To plough half a meter of snow in pitch dark and freezing cold might not yield snow, darkness or frost as beautiful elements per se but the resulting affirmation in context is beautiful: you are responsible for your life, you know how to make do with what you have and where you are and you make an effort. In short, you own your everyday life quite concretely.

5.2 An argument for diversity

In a society that worships mobility and associates staying in one place with a lack of intelligence, of money and sometimes of wellbeing and standards of living, the realization that people can choose to stay in a place for a variety of non-measurable reasons is called for. The prevailing negative approach to life in the rural North is based on elements that indicate a measure and thus yield quantitative comparisons: distance, amount, lack and need, less of, deficit and regression are in the vocabulary describing life in Lappish villages. These seemingly objective expressions hold an obvious relative bias pertaining to power relations: distance from where, amount compared to the standard set by whom, regression defined as what and by whom and so forth. However, rather than claiming revisions to quantitative statements, I propose a deeper understanding of qualitative statements as essentially not about quantity and as shedding light on the diversity of well-being which human individuals create and maintain.

“Lack” and “need” belong to the vocabulary of standards of living, whereas quality of life is about “kind.” The difference in standards of living becomes obvious if we think of whether one’s life can have too much or too little quality. The question with quality is never about the amount of it. One’s life is always of some quality, of some kind. Whether this quality is perceived as satisfying, as fitting and thus good enough from the perspective of a particular individual is a more appropriate question. Research and measuring of standards of living is needed, and in the reality of experienced everyday life, it intertwines with quality of life. It should not, however, be the only approach to everyday life. Research on quality of life concentrates on the kinds of possibilities people have in their lives. Thus, rather than measuring the amount, research of this kind emphasizes variety and diversity in kind.

It is my conviction after conducting this research that the ability to relate to the environment in which you live in a personally meaningful and creative way is facilitated by an environment of diversity. By this I mean two related things: a) that there is a diversity of habitable living environments for humans and b) that an environment that holds, demands and conveys diversity of life and action, and not just in the form of human life, is perceived to be of value and quality. The village of Suvanto might be scarcely populated in human numbers but the proximity of other life conveys the environment as being full of life (article IV). Suvanto is also portrayed as a village in which one is quite concretely responsible for making do, for his/her own well-being. There is perceived value in dwelling in an environment that demands a diversity of skills from an individual to make do in everyday life: to heat up a house, to grow and hunt food, to develop social connections in spite of distances and make ends meet in a variety of ways.

Pauline von Bonsdorff (1999: 154–155) writes insightfully that stability, resistance and even pain caused by our living conditions can be misunderstood as mere obstacles. This, for Bonsdorff, is indicative of placelessness—of losing touch with reality and of not grasping the many ways in which we are interrelated with our everyday-life environments and nature as a whole. Bonsdorff concludes that “there is a connection between our conditions of life – our environments and practices – and the ways in which we relate to each other, affectively and responsibly” (ibid.: 155). In highlighting desirable relations in one’s everyday life, the accounts of beauty in this research necessarily also held accounts of stability, resistance and even pain – most often tears and sweat. The resistance evident in the letters seemed to strengthen the relations to one’s everyday-life

environment that affirmed the fit between a person and her surroundings and were thus presented eventually as beautiful.

In this research, deliberate decisions pertaining to use of words and expressions are made. Some have been set from the beginning, while some were arrived at only in this summing up of the original articles. All of them will contribute to conceptual vocabulary of future research and can be considered as results of this research. Beautiful has been chosen from the start for many reasons that are accounted for in the original articles but most importantly for directing attention to what is perceived as being of value in everyday life in the North. During the course of this research, the clustering notions of beauty and well-being have begun to achieve breadth rather than height. By this I mean that the elevated sound of beautiful life or good life have begun to be understood as processes of seeking rather than fixed concentrations of moral worth. The notion of beauty has been proven relational and iterative in the accounts of the participants. As Elaine Scarry (2006) has it, we can indeed err in beauty. And as Scarry also notes, beauty is radically decentering rather than elevating – beauty makes for lateral characters rather than heroines: this is the basis for its relation with social justice.²⁴

In this vein of seemingly demoting notions for the sake of their eventual promotion, I will end up suggesting that in talking about well-being and evaluating the quality of life in the rural North, be it by the northerners themselves or by researchers or politicians, the expression “good enough” could also be employed. Good enough implies an approach in which the perspective of evaluation is not that of the outside looking in but that of a particular individual and her experiences. When life is good enough, it is so from the perspective, wishes and standards set by a particular individual: good enough for her purposes and fitting for her, to be evaluated as such by her.²⁵ The original context of this expression resides in the work of Donald W. Winnicott (1971), as a pediatrician and a psychologist, working with mothers and infants. His message for mothers to be good enough in relation to their infants rather than aiming for perfection holds a value base introduced also to education in order to alleviate the standards and

²⁴ An enticing idea discussed in detail and insight in Scarry’s (2006) book *On Beauty and Being Just*, but one that I will not venture in the scope of this summary nor have done at length in the original articles. I have, however, briefly touched the idea of decentering in article III.

²⁵ The solipsism seemingly implied here is countered in considering the negotiating of a shared background that ultimately affects one’s experiences and interpretations. This is discussed in chapter 4.3.

competition based culture aiming relentlessly for more, higher and faster (e.g., Simola 2001).

Thirdly, I wish to take the notion of survival and replace it with the less grandiose “making do” (as in de Certeau 1989: 29–42). If the prevalent vocabulary describing Lappish villages often entails words such as “dying” or “regressing,” the solution is not to start talking excessively about “surviving.” That this would be working within the same kind of vocabulary and challenging little or nothing. The notion of making do seems to address the feel of everyday life conveyed in the letters better. There is hardly a question of life or death to survive from. Instead there are a multitude of small challenges to cope with and to resolve. There is no end-point either: no climax before the curtains that would end in survival of the heroines. Rather, everyday life keeps on unfolding day after day, requiring constant attending to and making do with what you have and where you have it. To be able to make do with where you are requires functioning relations within your everyday-life environment.

The argument for diversity in this research is an argument advocating for attention to the variety of creative ways in which people in different everyday-life environments makes do and lead good enough lives. Diversity of sense perceptions and the communicating of them, diversity in what we perceive as beautiful, translate to a negotiated diversity in our cultures. Not to be dismissed if we consider humans as truly part of nature is the lesson taught by ecology: diversity means strength and ability to adapt to and survive change in the long run (Kinzig *et al.* 2002, see also Elton 1958).²⁶

5.3 Final remarks and implications for further research

A long time resettlement plot farmer and a wife from East Lapland, village of Salla, Eeva Heikkilä (1972, see also Heikkilä 1982) has written poems of her life in rural Lapland during the structural changes of the 1960s. Her first collection of poems brings forth an individual’s perspective on the post war-time resettlement policies. Heikkilä (1972: 64) writes something that weighs heavy on the heart of a researcher who is committed to bringing forth positive nuances of life in the rural North.

²⁶ And not only ecology with the notion of biodiversity (e.g., Takacs 1995 and Wilson 1992) but also linguistics with linguistic diversity (e.g., Skutnab-Kangas 2006) and cultural studies with cultural diversity (e.g., Maffi 2001) all point towards greater resilience and ability of entities to develop and thrive as a result of a diversity of ways of existing, acting and communicating.

*Sanot, että mieluusti
näkisit mökin akan
kuvaavan kaiken
räsymattona, jossa olisi
loimia ja kuteita.
Vivahteita sinä kaipaat
etkä löydä niitä
vaikka koko elämä on räsyä, lointa
ja kudetta
ja nyansseja sinua
vastaan, joka et
tajua
kuin omahyväisyytesi.*

*You say you'd like
to see the old bag
cast everything
on a rug, with
warp and weft.
Nuances are what you long for
and can't find
even if life itself is rugs, warps
and wefts
and nuances against
you, who don't
realise
but your smugness.²⁷*

This research has aimed at addressing people who find the rural North of Finland a good enough place in which to live to such a degree that they do not wish to leave at this point. In considering what is of value in everyday life in the North, I do not wish to deny either the downfalls or the experiences of ill-being and the desires to leave. What I do wish to aggregate is the notion that perceived well-being is not just relative to the perceiving individual but to the environment in which everyday life is led. Not all environments facilitate well-being for all people.

Rather than keeping the rural North habited, an artificial post-war settlement process, the result of which can be read in Heikkilä's poems, I argue for ensuring that it is *habitable* for those who wish to live there. This means realizing that people craft their well-being in different ways, with different resources, relative to their everyday-life environments. Should the rural North of Finland offer an everyday environment in which some people find it possible to make their everyday lives good enough, then the aspects that are of perceived value should be recognized. To let the rural North entail habitable places does not equal developing its infrastructure to the exact level of southern Finland. It means to recognize and uphold environment-specific features of perceived well-being: to pay attention to what is good enough already.

²⁷ Translated from Finnish by the author.

Contrary to popular discourse and glaring headlines in women's magazines, escaping from everyday life is not always the only solution to finding pleasure and well-being in your life. Everyday life does not necessarily posit as the opposite of a holiday spent far from one's usual everyday-life environments. By dwelling in, rather than escaping, everyday life, the participants of this research found value and meaning as well as deep satisfaction and rest in their everyday lives.

Having said this, however, escaping as such does not necessarily convey avoidance or denial (Tuan 2000). I have talked about aesthetic escapes (article II) as spaces and times of creative responding, as facing the realities of one's everyday-life conditions. This is a strand of thought that deserves further research and theoretical development. It is the direction of the escaping what I propose to be relevant in considering different kinds of escapes.

Escaping to something different, to enter another environment, is a direction towards unfamiliarity. Escaping to something similar, in the midst of your everyday concerns and environments, is a direction towards familiarity. Both directions yield discoveries and reflection, albeit of different kinds. The former is the more common pattern: go far. The latter's potential is not widely recognized yet: go close, explore and uncover the variety of unconscious ways in which you are interrelated with your environment, grow roots and ward off placelessness to regain a sense of belonging and well-being where you are.

Everyday life could be realized as material to respond to and to craft and compose. Aesthetic escaping is the aesthetizing of everyday life, of seeking to make you and the conditions of your everyday-life fit. It is the kind of romanticizing that nobody can do for you, but that you must take care of yourself. Kevin Melchionne (2007: 183) speaks of orchestrating: "Rather than interpose a radical break between idle pleasure and arduous necessities, I want to suggest that homemaking, when it is not simply servitude, is a matter of integrating pleasure and labour, of extending the reach of pleasure. Homemaking is the orchestration of patterns of habit."

The practical implications this research yields pertain most obviously to the reflective creativity that writing entails, as well as to the significance of writing one another and reading what others write. The process of articulating the ordinary is a process of conservation. In paying attention to one's everyday life, the things selected for articulation are judgments of worth: some things are picked over others, and those not picked evaporate necessarily or turn to frail memories. The editing of one's everyday life is a concrete venture well adaptable to various

situations with various people and through various methods and materials. Scrapbooks and diaries are well-established practices already in existence; blogs and other virtual applications are becoming widely established. What is novel, however, might be the focus of attention to the allegedly trivial: excursions into the textures of everyday life could be developed as practices of aesthetising, of growth through creative agency. In learning how to escape near, we learn to discover, evaluate, and conserve what we already have.

In growing as a human being the understanding and consideration of beauty in everyday life aids in finding and strengthening the aspects that yield our lives meaning. In the practices and principles of institutional education the considering of beauty, particularly in everyday life, can shed light to the multitude of evaluations and judgments we make and live by daily but hardly recognize. In realizing beauty as an iterative process teachers and students could embark on recognizing and challenging the limits of it, thereby negotiating and participating in the diversity of cultures they bring into schools. An ethos of good-enough life being of quality could be addressed in schools through attention to the beauty already present in our lives. Finally, beauty is to be understood as thoroughly entangled with the notions of hope and promise, the cornerstones education should build on (Winston 2010).

The strands of further research implicated by this thesis include the phenomenon and concept of escaping, also in connection with how escaping ordinary life is entangled with escaping ordinary language (Savickey 1999: 113, Wittgenstein 1953/2001). In general, the potential of the later thought of Wittgenstein on everyday life and ordinary language is in need of being realized and thoroughly discussed pertaining to both education (see, however, e.g., Juuso 2007 in brief) and everyday-life aesthetics. In need of further discussion and explicit exploring is also the gender dimension of both perceived well-being and of beauty in everyday life in the remote North. The directions I have already begun to take further are those of environmental literacy (Rautio 2010) and the phenomenon of sharing sense perceptions and aesthetic judgments in everyday life along the lines of Wittgenstein (e.g., 1966, 1953/2001, chapter 4.3 of this summary, and Rautio & Karjalainen 2010).

I have come to understand the scope of this research as a kind of environmental literacy. It is often about mastering functionally the language – phenomena and processes – of natural sciences. Revisions have, however, been formulated, for instance, from mere functional to critical ecological literacy. In addition to sound scientific knowledge of ecosystems,

Roger H. J. King (2000) for one proposes an environmentally literate person to also possess sound knowledge in history and social sciences of one's culture as well as a capability of moral inquiry. However, independent of these definitions, the levels of environmental literacy of pupils (e.g., Hye-Eun *et al.* 2007) as well as teachers in training (e.g., Yavez *et al.* 2009) keep raising concerns worldwide. I argue that there are two pitfalls in the mainstream understanding of environmental literacy based on what this research has begun to suggest: 1) the subjective experiences and relations to the environment that people have in their everyday lives are not addressed and 2) the creative agency of people in using language in relating to environment is not addressed.

In further exploring subjective experiences of and relations to everyday-life environments, a diversity of research approaches, focuses and methods are needed. To illustrate this claim, I will briefly address an indeed diverse approach by one researcher-designer. Chris Speed (e.g., 2009 and see Fields 2009) is a research active designer working on the interfaces of digital architecture, human geography and social computing. He uses ubiquitous computing, locative media and electronic tagging in research of networks and relations between people, objects and places. In contesting vision as the ultimate way to relate to your surroundings or to reflect on these relations, Speed compiles maps based on other sensory information such as humidity or movement. His work aims to challenge the modernist attempt to give us a crystalline view of our environments from the above, in the form of a traditional map.

To bring variety of expression to this research, one needs not to have ventured to the lengths that Chris Speed explores. As an educated photographer, I started this research with the idea of photographing beauty in my everyday life as well as writing letters about it. I held an ideal to include in my research data a visual strand, a complementing form of expression. However, the sheer reality of my life, with a small child at the time of data compilation, limited my research approach to only writing. The research also began to center more tightly around the notion of well-being in a particular place and of the linguistic expressions with which one understands, reflects on and shares one's perceptions. Photographs fell behind in this research, but a powerful testimony to their expressiveness of everyday life in the rural North of Finland remains in the work of Matti Saanio (e.g., 2008). Saanio's pictures from the mid-20th century tell the minor stories of everyday life in the North with an underlying theme of human subsistence expanding to universal considerations of the relationship between man and his environment (Krohn 2008).

As I write this summary, a column appears in the University's public relations magazine *Aktuumi* that uses an all too familiar vocabulary of the North of Finland. Leaning on statistics of population development and also concentrating on figures of employment, the villages of North are described as "becoming desolate" and as "regressive." The column states: "The end seems to be looming. This negative cycle is hard to break" (Rusanen 2010: 9). While the figures are correct and the phenomenon of increasing population concentration to urban areas is a proven trend, the vocabulary with which the rural North is referred to is often unnecessarily negative. The pessimistic expressions lean on numbers and measures rather than experiences of quality. In light of this research, the villages of the North of Finland might be talked about as surviving, making-do and changing and as good enough environments for some people to find well-being in everyday life.

The column in question is part of a series addressing the "vitality of the North of Finland." Vitality does not reside only in numbers. It is about life and also the quality of life of which figures of population and employment indicate but a fraction. Let us keep complementing this picture.

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