For my research project I am interested in philosophically analyzing the way urban design practice and research generates and deploys concepts of the body. As a discipline, philosophy tends to seek the universal elements in its objects of study in order to achieve a unified explanation of reality. For the philosopher, then, the particular temperature of a concrete bench in a plaza or the length of time one waits at a crosswalk are merely passing moments in a larger chain of events composing reality. This approach, however, is reductive. How can philosophy hope to produce a unified theory if it ignores the very details out of which experience itself is composed? It seems today that academic thought is split between the empirical particularities of our everyday lives and universal theories of explanation, leaving our bodies caught directly in the middle. This is why I argue that to study the human body’s relationship to the everyday urban spaces we occupy will begin to close this gap between what is particular and what is universal.

Finland is an ideal place to study the relationship between the body and urban space. The large role design has played in Finland’s development has resulted in a vibrant contemporary urban research culture. This design heritage has proven to be a positive cultural force, allowing for an awareness of complex social issues and a sensitivity toward the intimacy of bodily experience in daily life. Finland’s government and universities are in the midst of several research projects pertaining to their urban environments. Research programs such as the multi-university Alvar Aalto Chair “Urban Laboratory” and Aalto University’s YTK Land Use Planning and Urban Studies Group engage in empirical study of Finland’s major urban centers. These multi-disciplinary programs, run by both researchers and professionals, are geared toward the unification of professional practice with research. As such, Finland’s planning culture is uniquely situated to address the issues surrounding urban life.

The purpose of Finland’s research is to balance the individual’s experience of urban spaces with the many practical factors required in any given urban environment. The relationship of this urban practice to the human body is unique as the demands of lived communal experience bear directly on the work urban planners and researchers perform. The environmental, political, economic, and social factors that constitute the character of a given space play a major role in determining what is or is not possible for these designers and researchers. It is, therefore, urban designers and researchers who determine exactly how these factors will come to bear on each of our bodies. It is this privileged understanding of the body that must be explored.

Thus, my research aims to understand the unique ways that the Finnish design and planning community conceptualizes bodily experience and how those concepts can be applied across disciplines. There are two main components to this inquiry. First, I seek to understand the unique insights about the body that the pragmatic practices of design and planning generate. Second, I argue that Finnish design and planning fosters ways of thinking about the body that are useful to disciplines outside their own context, especially philosophy. That is, because philosophy tends to work on theories of the body that are removed from the data, methods, and practices of the design and planning community, there is a gap between these respective areas of inquiry. Certainly both design and philosophy develop theories about the body. However, these two communities rarely overlap, never sharing their respective insights about the body and especially the body’s experience of space. On the basis of Finland’s rich design heritage and present commitment to human-friendly urban development, I argue that understanding Finland’s design and planning community will contribute to cross disciplinary theories of the body that are original and useful given our increasingly urbanized world.
STATEMENT OF GRANT PURPOSE

Finland, Urban Development and Planning

My research will proceed in three distinct phases: immersion, data integration, and presentation. The first phase begins with my immersion in the world of Finnish urban design research and practice. On the research side, I will be working with Professor Marketta Kyttä of Aalto University’s YTK Land Use Planning and Urban Studies Research Group. I will be assisting with their research in developing human-oriented metrics and feedback methods for urban environment evaluation. The purpose of my time with Dr. Kyttä is to learn about the data collection methodologies she and other urban researchers are developing for understanding and translating a user’s everyday experience of urban environments into useful planning information.

For my immersion in the world of practice, I have been invited by Mr. Timo Hämäläinen (Urban Policy Adviser at the Helsinki-based urban design consultancy firm MDI) to accompany him around Helsinki on a tour of recent urban development projects and to conduct interviews with him and other members of his consulting firm on conceptions of the body in urban design. Timo is also a freelance writer on issues surrounding urban design and his work has been featured in the Guardian and the Atlantic. Timo has also agreed to introduce me to a variety of other urban planning design professionals with whom I can conduct personal interviews.

Complementing my work with Dr. Kyttä and Mr. Hämäläinen will be my exploration of a variety of notable examples of quality Finnish urban design and planning. These sites will include Alvar Aalto’s Finlandia Hall on Helsinki’s Töölölahti Bay, Juhani Pallasmaa’s Kamppi Center in Helsinki’s downtown (Finland’s largest ever single urban construction site), as well as various other urban sites around Finland available by rail travel. The purpose of these visits will be to observe through firsthand experience the elements that Finland’s urban designers are using to create human-friendly urban spaces.

The second phase of my research (late October to early March) will begin during the onset of the Finnish winter, as travel will become restricted by weather. The primary function of this phase is to commence in organizing, strengthening, and conceptualizing the data obtained during the first phase. During this period, I will work closely with Dr. Johanna Oksala of the University of Helsinki’s department of philosophy to conceptualize and translate the data and methodologies I have learned from Dr. Kyttä and others into the context of present social and philosophical research on the body and space. Dr. Oksala has also invited me to participate in her graduate seminar on theoretical and philosophical approaches to understanding the body and experience, which will provide me with a conceptual basis for integrating the data I gather. I will also use this time to conduct library, museum, and archival research in Helsinki, as well as to begin drafting my findings into conference paper form for presentation.

The final phase of my research will take place from March to May, as Finland’s winter begins to subside. I will be accompanying Dr. Kyttä and other YTL researchers as they begin spring field studies around greater Helsinki. I will also be completing my paper for presentation to both the University of Helsinki’s department of Philosophy, History, Culture, and Art Studies, and to Aalto University’s departments of Real Estate, Planning and Geoinformatics.

Ultimately, I see this project serving as the foundation for my doctoral research on theories of the body. The opportunity to study the way local environments and cultures generate and respond to notions of the body and bodily experience in a country with a such a rich heritage for human-centered design would be invaluable both philosophically as well as personally. As a future professor of philosophy, I will one day be in a unique position to transmit these Finnish conceptions of the body to academic discussions as well as to the many students I will encounter throughout my career. Thus, my time in Finland will make it possible for me to foster the multi-disciplinary and cross-cultural exchange necessary to close the gap between generalized theories of reality and the everyday spaces wherein we become particular people.
Fulbright U.S. Student Program  

Letter of Affiliation

To the Fulbright Student Selections Committee,

On behalf of Aalto University, and specifically the YTK Land Use Planning and Urban Studies Research Group, I am pleased to offer full support for Fulbright applicant's proposal is interesting and meshes well with our own research aims.

's approach to understanding how urban research and planning practices generate conceptions of the body is unique for its potential use to urban research itself and also for its cross-disciplinary potential. His work will add to the team's body of research by contributing to the ongoing development of our conceptions of the 'user', which is the subject of our research. His proposal is feasible as it maps directly onto the goals and methods of our project. In addition to research participation and support, we are also pleased to supply with a workspace, access to the Internet, our library, publications collection, fellow researchers for guidance, as well as our facilities for the Academic Year of 2016-2017. We will also assist with identifying and gathering additional data that may be relevant to 's research project.

We are pleased to offer participation and immersion in the YTK Land Use Planning and Urban Studies Research Group. Our research focuses on developing methods for the evaluation of user experience and perception of urban spaces through web-based technologies. Therefore, I believe that Ryan's own project will benefit from direct participation with our program.

's proposed project directly aligns with the aims of Finland's planning culture and will be helpful in further examining conceptions of the body and user-experience data in urban planning. 's work will contribute to the planning community at large and provide insight into this relatively unexplored research topic.

Please contact me if there is anything else I can do on 's behalf. I am very excited about the possibility of hosting as a Fulbright U.S. Student Researcher and am eager to introduce him to Finnish culture.

Sincerely,

Marketta Kyttä  
associate professor in Land use planning  

YTK - Land Use Planning and Urban Studies Group  
Department of Real Estate, Planning and Geoinformatics  
Aalto University
31 August 2015

To the Fulbright Selection Committee:

On behalf of the Department of Philosophy, History, Culture and Art Studies at the University of Helsinki, I am pleased to offer potential Fulbright researcher [redacted] institutional and departmental affiliation. The topic of [redacted]'s research fits well with my own research interests, as well as others in our department. [redacted]'s approach to thinking about the body through the concrete practices of architecture fills a gap in current philosophical research and fully deserves the support necessary for the project's fruition. His unique background in both architecture and philosophy gives him a set of skills that I believe will result in an exceptionally successful and interesting project.

My own work in the philosophy of the body has focused mainly on the connections between the body, space, and techniques of power. I have appropriated particularly the work of Michel Foucault to argue that architectural spaces have disciplinary effects on the people inhabiting them. This is evident in the case of such institutional buildings as prisons, barracks, factories and hospitals, but these effects are also detectable in many everyday spaces we inhabit. There is thus interesting synergy between our research interests and I would welcome the opportunity to follow the development of [redacted]'s project more closely.

Should [redacted] be awarded the research grant, I have agreed to provide him assistance and guidance in his research. I have agreed to meet with [redacted] regularly to discuss his research and assist in the development of his ideas. [redacted] is also invited to participate in the graduate seminar I will be teaching in Fall 2016. Further, [redacted] will be able to discuss his research with fellow graduate students, available faculty and researchers, as well as participating in department events such as colloquia, talks and presentations, and reading groups. The opportunity to be part of the department's rich philosophical community will be an invaluable resource for [redacted] as his research develops. Finally, we will also provide [redacted] access to both the Internet and the university library system. Our library contains a wide variety of texts in English on subjects from architecture to philosophy and beyond.

I offer [redacted] my mentorship during the duration of his studies and research. I fully support his application for a Fulbright research grant.

Sincerely,

[signature]

Dr. Johanna Oksala, Ph.D.
Academy of Finland Research Fellow
Department of Philosophy, History, Culture and Art Studies
University of Helsinki, Finland
Email: johanna.oksala@helsinki.fi
Telephone: +358-50-4160782
To: The U.S. Fulbright selections committee,

I am writing this letter in full support of [redacted]'s application to conduct Fulbright research here in Finland from 2016-17. [redacted]'s project is not just interesting but also important as Finland continues to push its own research and thinking about urban development forward. [redacted]'s multi-disciplinary approach also meets well with Finland’s own interest in fostering cross-disciplinary exchange of research and ideas.

In support of [redacted]'s application, I would like to lend my knowledge of the Finnish urban design and planning community, and Finnish culture more broadly. I currently serve as the Urban Policy Advisor at the Helsinki-based strategic urban development consultancy firm Management Design Intelligence (MDI Public Ltd). So I am in a position to provide [redacted] direct access to interviews and discussions with real working urban planners, as well as to current projects in the works. I am also the author of the website www.urbanfinland.com and a free-lance writer on issues concerning urbanism and urban development in Finland with pieces featured in such noted publications as the Atlantic and the Guardian.

I would love the opportunity to guide [redacted] around Helsinki to show him projects and sites relevant to his research; how the city has developed from a planning point of view; and perhaps most importantly, the city from the point of view of a native of Finland and resident of Helsinki. Finally, I would like to relay that my own grandfather participated in the early years of the Fulbright program, so I am well aware of Fulbright’s desire to foster cultural exchange. I would therefore be delighted to return Fulbright’s favor to my grandfather by providing [redacted] with a truly immersive experience during his time here.

I have already exchanged many emails with [redacted] and I am confident in his research, his thinking, and his openness and politeness in cross-cultural interaction. It is with these things in mind that I extend my support for [redacted] and his U.S. Fulbright research application.

Many thanks,

[Signature]

Timo Hämäläinen, M.Sc., M.A.
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Personal Statement
Ryan Beitz, Finland, Urban Development and Planning

As a kid growing up on a wheat farm in Eastern Washington, life could get pretty dull. There is certainly plenty of space to run around, but after awhile you start crave a little more stimulation. This is why, for me, our family visits to the public library were an exciting opportunity to see what the world had to offer. Through the library, I was allowed to check out any video tape I wanted, which always meant speculative documentaries about the existence of space aliens (how could I not wonder about crop circles?) and travel videos. These two genres quickly became linked in that the far off places in travel videos were indeed alien, but whose existence I could believe in. I was most fascinated by Northwestern Europe; something about the frozen landscapes of Arctic culture seemed sufficiently otherworldly for me to wonder what must go on there. What singled Finland out, for me, was the fact that the Finnish language is neither Indo-European, nor Slavic in origin. I was instantly fascinated by the distinctiveness of these Uralic-speaking people.

As an architecture student, my fascination with Finnish culture was again sparked by the Modern design credited to the region. The work of figures such as Eero Saarinen, Alvar Aalto, and more recently Juhani Pallasmaa, still to this day strike me as reflecting the austere yet organic beauty of those northern landscapes. In fact, it was during my time as a design student that Juhani Pallasmaa himself came and spoke to my department. The significance of this event can hardly be understated, as the University of Idaho’s architecture department is hardly well known, whereas Dr. Pallasmaa is a world-renowned architect and author.

To this day, I remember Dr. Pallasmaa making the argument that contemporary design practice has overly privileged the visual aspects of our buildings and urban spaces at the expense of our other senses. The consequence has been a culture of design that has forgotten about the body and its experience of space, often resulting in urban environments that do little to support the unitary and embodied nature of our experience. I found his argument compelling on a personal level, realizing that I myself had conceived of design in largely visual terms. Even today as I study philosophy, I find Dr. Pallasmaa’s insight relevant. Philosophy, as it is practiced in the United States, is itself generally more concerned with “seeing” the truth in ideas, neglecting the body as a legitimate subject for inquiry. This undermines philosophy’s ability to provide an explanation of our experience of both our bodies and reality as whole.

Although I cannot rightly say that Dr. Pallasmaa’s insight alone was responsible for my transition to philosophy—I did, after all, have a few great professors who encouraged me to engage design and the world from a theoretical point of view—I certainly take the encounter as formative. Dr. Pallasmaa’s impact illustrates the repeated positive encounters I have had with Finnish culture, albeit from afar. I would like to finally close this gap between the Finnish people and myself. So while Finland is an ideal place to study the interaction between the human body and urban space, I also look forward to the opportunity to engage with Finland on a specifically cultural level. Once there, I plan to take advantage of such a rare opportunity by immersing myself in the language, customs, and worldview through a variety of interactions. Not only will I engage in exchange with my mentors and fellow students, but also in the uniquely Finnish style of daily life—a level of immersion one only gets by living with a culture. Perhaps most crucial, though, is the chance to experience my own body as the Finns do theirs. Living in another culture goes a long way toward expanding one’s perspective, but experiencing my own body as another culture does is an experience that can never be transmitted visually; it must be lived.