

S W E D I S H  
COLLEGIUM  
*for* ADVANCED STUDY

Seminar

**KALLE PUOLAKKA**

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Docent in Aesthetics, University of Helsinki

*Dewey and the Everyday in Aesthetics*

Thursday, 21 November, 4:15 p.m.

In the Thunberg Lecture Hall  
SCAS, Linneanum, Thunbergsvägen 2, Uppsala  
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## ABOUT KALLE PUOLAKKA

Kalle Puolakka received his doctorate from the University of Helsinki in 2009, with a thesis on the philosophical problems of the interpretation of art. Prior to his term at SCAS, Puolakka worked for three years as a postdoctoral researcher at the International Institute of Applied Aesthetics, which is part of the Lahti Unit of the Palmenia Centre for Continuing Education, University of Helsinki. He received the title of Docent in Aesthetics from the University of Helsinki in 2012.

Puolakka has done research on the philosophy of interpretation, philosophy of music, Arthur Danto's philosophy of art, and pragmatist aesthetics. He is the author of *Relativism and Intentionalism in Interpretation: Davidson, Hermeneutics, and Pragmatism* (Lexington Books, 2011). Other recent publications include "Metaphors and Naturalism: Towards a Rortian Pragmatist Aesthetics" in *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy* (2011) and "Brünnhilde's Transformation: Leitmotifs and Love in Wagner's *Die Walküre*" in *Estetika: Central European Journal of Aesthetics* (2012).

At SCAS, Puolakka will work on his postdoctoral research project which attempts to build a pragmatist view of aesthetics and culture, drawing on themes of naturalism, imagination, and metaphor found in the work of two major figures of pragmatism, John Dewey and Richard Rorty. He will especially concentrate on an article that examines how artworks, by engaging peoples' imagination, can give rise to the kind of sense of communality between people that is at the heart of what Dewey calls "democratic experience". These pragmatist ideas will be illuminated in the article with the compositions of John Adams and particularly his work *On the Transmigration of Souls*, which was composed as a commemoration of the victims of 9/11. Before the end of his term, Puolakka also hopes to finish an article that investigates the ways in which musical quotations function in the works of Dmitri Shostakovich.

## ABSTRACT

Aesthetics has primarily concerned itself with philosophical issues of art. However, in recent years there has been a steady increase of interest to the aesthetics of everyday life. The pragmatist philosopher John Dewey (1859-1952) is frequently mentioned as an important historical predecessor for this trend. In this paper, I shall provide a fresh view of Dewey's place within everyday aesthetics by drawing attention to aspects both in Dewey's own work and in contemporary interpretations of his philosophy, which have not been previously that thoroughly discussed in the context of everyday aesthetics. As a first step of the re-examination I intend to carry out, I develop a reading of Dewey's concept of aesthetic experience that takes as its starting point the important position Dewey ascribes to imagination in this form of experience in the later parts of his classic work in aesthetics *Art as Experience* (1934), after which I shall critically examine some existing versions of everyday aesthetics from a Deweyan angle. In the final part of the paper, I argue that Dewey places the origins of aesthetic experience to a more fundamental level of human existence than everyday aestheticians have realized. In this part of the paper we approach Deweyan ideas of aesthetic naturalism and cultural emergence, that is, how aesthetic and other cultural phenomena emerge from nonhuman natural processes.