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Intervening on the art intervention: The Finnish Medicines Agency vs. Finnexia[®]

This paper presentation examines the ethical implications surrounding a legal complaint filed by the Finnish Medicines Agency (Fimea) towards Aalto University in October of 2012. The statement issued by Fimea concerned issues of medical representation surrounding Finnexia[®], a multimedia advertisement campaign for a (fictitious) pharmaceutical drug that helps people learn the Finnish language. Finnexia[®] was created as the primary artistic production of my doctoral research at Aalto University School of Arts, Design and Architecture. The project was presented in the Helsinki Railway Station as live commercial performance in 2012. Through the use of pharmaceutical parody, Finnexia[®] aimed to encourage public dialogue about language acquisition and the experience of the foreigner in Finland. In this sense, the research addresses the conference sub-theme of cultural belonging/not belonging. On a secondary level, Finnexia[®] presented a satirical intervention into the practices of direct-to-consumer pharmaceutical advertising, and the proliferation of 'quick fix', pill-based medical treatment. This work is framed within the realm of practice-led artistic research. The inquiry process places the artist as both observer and participant in a self-reflective process that draws from various methods and disciplines.

This paper explores issues raised in Fimea's legal complaint towards Aalto University, particularly in terms of what a Fimea official described as 'false hope' in the public eye, generated through Finnexia[®]'s alleged misrepresentation of medicine and violation of consumer protection laws. Along these lines, the research examines the conference sub-theme of norms of culture and scientific communities. In the paper, I articulate my own position in response to the concerns of the Finnish medicines agency, through the lens of Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of *answerability* (responsibility). In this discussion, I refer to Sevda Caliskan's concept of how a merging of Bakhtin's approach to ethics and aesthetics may offer a way understand his concept of dialogism. Here, I extend Caliskan's proposal, applying it to Bakhtin's idea of answerability, in an attempt to better understand the dialogical relationship between artistic desires and the considerations of the community at large. Through this exploration, I posit that, as an artist, one must consider all ethical aspects of the art during production – through the process of making aesthetic decisions. At the same time, one must work to preserve the original intent of the artwork. Ultimately, then, how do we find a balance between pragmatism and radicality in art? What is the responsibility of the artist-researcher to this end?

View the Finnexia[®] product site and medical animation at these links: <http://finnexia.fi>
and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fB2D8NJE-88>

