

## **Ask the Aesthician:**

Interview with Katherine Thomson-Jones (Oberlin College & Conservatory)

**“Ask the Aesthician” is a new series in ASAGE where we conduct interviews with professional aestheticians on topics of interest for graduate students looking to work in aesthetics in and outside of academia. Each issue, our interviews focus on a different facet of working in aesthetics. For our first interview, we are tackling an often-intimidating topic: the academic job market. If you have any topics or specific questions you’d like to see discussed in future issues, or aestheticians you’d like to hear from, please let us know!**

**Many thanks to Katherine Thomson-Jones for taking the time to give such thoughtful and helpful responses in this virtual interview!**

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**Q: How do you keep yourself motivated while job searching?**

A: Honestly, when I was looking for a job, I was mostly motivated by fear of unemployment.

I was lucky enough to have a one-year teaching fellowing at the University of St Andrews for which I took a year off from writing my dissertation at the University of Toronto. I really loved my year at St. Andrews and realized I was happier as faculty than I had been as a graduate student. I found the teaching very rewarding in itself but also helpful for my writing. Given this experience, I was very clear on my desire to stay in academia.

**Q: What was the most important thing you did for yourself when you were job searching?**

A: Flew to Puerto Rico! My mum was working there at the time, and visiting with her, especially coming from the Canadian cold, was very rejuvenating. It also allowed me to gain a healthier perspective on my job search.

**Q: I want to make sure that the department I join (if I am offered a job) has a climate that is welcoming to people with my identities, but I also don't want to reveal too much (e.g. disability status) during my interview. What kinds of things can/should I ask to get a feel for the climate of the department?**

A: I would suggest asking what the students are like, and what kind of faculty community there is. You can follow up these questions with more specific ones about what kinds of people and groups are represented at the college in question, and whether there is support for different kinds of student/faculty member.

**Q: It can be hard to find jobs in philosophy departments with an AOS in aesthetics. What steps can I take to maximize my potential to get a job? Is it wise to split my research attention (say, to aesthetics and ethics) to make myself "more marketable"?**

A: When I was a graduate student, I was advised to pick a thesis topic at the intersection of ethics and aesthetics so that I could claim both subfields as my AOS. Perhaps it is a sign that this strategy worked that I had interviews for jobs in ethics as well as in aesthetics. Then again, perhaps I only got the interviews for the ethics jobs because I had been teaching moral and political philosophy at St. Andrews. Based on my experience in running searches, I would say that stating your AOS as both aesthetics and something else doesn't really work if all your publications are in aesthetics. There are so many people applying for jobs that, if a department wants an ethics person, they are going to choose someone whose research and teaching is squarely in ethics.

Having said all this, I think it's great to have an AOS in one of the growing subfields, such as philosophy of race, feminist philosophy, philosophy of disability, or environmental philosophy.

**Q: Should I submit a writing sample that is in aesthetics or something in another sub-field that shows more of my range?**

A: Just submit the best writing you have.

**Q: What sorts of non-academic jobs would be a good fit for someone trained in aesthetics?**

A: I know people trained in aesthetics who have gone into tech jobs, have turned to writing about art for a popular audience, and have gone into college administration, grant writing (particularly for arts institutions), and publishing.

**Q: What common mistakes do you see in applicants for your department? Anything I should avoid in my application materials? Anything I should avoid during an interview?**

A: Based on my experience on search committees, I would say that a big turn off during interviews is when the interviewee sounds like they are just reciting stock answers to questions that they have memorized. Try to sound natural and friendly.

It is also important to come across as genuinely interested in and excited about the job in question. Do some research on the relevant institution ahead of time, and come prepared to say why you suit this job in particular, and to ask questions about things that sound interesting and distinctive about the institution.

**Q: What is missing from most otherwise good job applications?**

A: A really clear CV: This depends partly on style and format — using a really clear (and attractive) font, and spacing the text well so that the reader is not overwhelmed. It also depends on making sure that all the crucial information is given right up front — AOS, AOC; graduate program; most important publication; any significant teaching achievement, e.g., an award.