

POPULAR

INQUIRY

The Journal of Kitsch, Camp and Mass Culture

Volume 1 / 2017

**AESTHETICS OF POPULAR
CULTURE
AS ENVIROMENTAL
AESTHETICS**

Ossi Naukkarinen

Aalto University, ossi.naukkarinen@aalto.fi

AESTHETICS OF POPULAR CULTURE AS ENVIROMENTAL AESTHETICS

Ossi Naukkarinen

***Abstract:** Philosophical aesthetics, like many other academic fields, has in recent years been invigorated by the study of environmental questions and popular culture. Meanwhile, environmental aesthetics has become an independent field in its own right, separate from the philosophy of art, which has traditionally dominated the field of aesthetics. In popular aesthetics, however, the search for identity and the separation from high art and its philosophy are still far from complete. One way to break away from this restrictive relationship is to look for a new point of reference. A new liberating ally of popular aesthetics seems to be found precisely in environmental aesthetics, which came into its own earlier.*

My main argument is that, when outlining the aesthetics of popular culture, it is fruitful to approach popular phenomena as environments. To illustrate the idea, I will draw on some of the most important observations made in environmental aesthetics about how environments are characterized and experienced, and I will apply those observations to analyze some paradigmatic popular phenomena. To the best of my knowledge, this has not been systematically attempted anywhere. At the same time, I intend to show that many aesthetic approaches still commonly used in connection with high art are not that well suited to the discussion of popular culture, and when confining themselves to these, many famous developers of popular aesthetics are making an error that prevents them from understanding the most essential characteristics of popular phenomena.

What I do not intend to offer is a strict definition of popular phenomena, nor do I discuss any problematic borderline cases. Loosely speaking, by phenomena in popular culture, I mean ones that typically are, or are seeking to become, popular among a fairly large group of people; that are distributed via mass media or that are themselves mass media; and that are relatively unsurprising and easy to receive, although specialized, detachedly ironic and discerning readings are also possible. These characterizations do not comprehensively and ex-

haustively describe popular phenomena, and they cannot be considered unique to them only. Nevertheless, they describe things that are quite essential in the popular domain, and they suffice for the purposes of this article. Examples of late 1990s popular phenomena in Finland, when broadly defined, include the Spice Girls, Jari Sillanpää, ice-hockey matches, Linda Brava, the Rolling Stones, Levi's products, Jack Nicholson movies and roller skating. A large part of advertising falls into the surrounding domain. When discussing the aesthetics of phenomena like these, the terms commonly used include popular art, low art, entertainment, or mass art. Our attention is drawn to the persistent occurrence of the word 'art'; the word 'environment' is not commonly mentioned in this context.

To be precise, I do not discuss the field of popular culture in its entirety, and I do not suggest that my observations would, as such, be applicable across the board. Popular literature, for example, would perhaps require a slightly different approach. I would particularly like to point out that my subject is the popular culture that enjoys wide popularity and is consumed by the masses. There is also esoteric popular culture that is the property of a very small elite group or subculture, but, here, I am not interested in that. It should also be noted that mass consumption and wide popularity are by no means limited to the field of popular culture, if popular culture is to be kept, at least in a practical sense, separate from high culture. There are also mass phenomena within high culture, such as Mozart's *The Magic Flute* and The Three Tenors, but they, too, are outside the scope of this article.

Drawing a line between popular and high culture and art is, of course, difficult, and some phenomena, such as the band Pan Sonic or The Three Tenors, do not seem to sit comfortably in either category. As has been demonstrated many times, it is not possible to make a universally valid distinction between high and popular, based on formal characteristics of artistic works. This does not mean that somewhat separate domains of high and popular culture do not exist, but that the placement of phenomena into one or the other category, and the formation of the categories themselves, take place based on social and historical principles and paradigms. Furthermore, very simple issues, such as the choice of instrument in music, the artist's visual appearance, or the distribution channels of their works may have a considerable effect on the categorization: an artist who looks like Jimi Hendrix, plays electric guitar and performs in pubs, could be playing structurally extremely complex works that fit the paradigms of high art, without probably being categorized as high art. I will not discuss the boundaries between high and low any further.¹

To systematically outline how the observations made are suited to characterizing high art and its reception would deserve an article of its own. There does not seem to be any funda-

mental obstacle to viewing phenomena in art as environments; in fact, many phenomena in contemporary art seem to require it. For example, naive work-centricity has long been challenged in art debate through, for example, the introduction of ideas about the role of the recipient in reception research, and the death of the author. Serving as an example of environment-centric contemporary art, which, however, is not environmental art in the traditional sense, is 'community art'. Examples of this include, Mierle Ukeles' project with the New York City Department of Sanitation or, in Finland, Tiina Kuhanen's project at the Isku furniture company. Both artists have worked within a corporate organization as artists, emphasizing the values and practices of art, and have provoked members of the community into a debate, to explore their relationship with art. Has the time come to overturn the traditional practice in aesthetics of viewing practically everything through art, and start considering art using means that have been more central outside art aesthetics? What, then, would happen to strict frameworks, frozen images, and the detached, unisensory art connoisseurship? This is something to think about as you read on.

What I am not taking a stand on is how well the environment-oriented approach works in analyzing phenomena outside mass popular culture. Possibly very well. What is obvious to me is that the approach works for analyzing and shedding light on mass popular culture, and this is what I intend to show below.

Without going into detail, my observations on environmental aesthetics are based on ideas put forward by, for example, David Abram, Arnold Berleant, Pauline von Bonsdorff, Gernot Böhme, Allen Carlson, Ronald Hepburn, Pauli Tapani Karjalainen, J. Douglas Porteous and Yrjö Sepänmaa.

The aesthetics of popular culture, which I will discuss in a little more detail, has, in recent years, been analyzed and developed by many philosophers, not to mention other cultural researchers. The most well-known representatives of the philosophical approach are Noël Carroll (*A Philosophy of Mass Art*), Theodore Gracyk (*Rhythm and Noise*), David Novitz (*The Boundaries of Art*) and Richard Shusterman (*Pragmatist Aesthetics and Practicing Philosophy*). This article also draws on an as-yet-largely-ignored work that deserves a special mention: Sung-Bong Park's dissertation *An Aesthetics of the Popular Arts*. Even the academic and conservative *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, one of the leading journals in aesthetics, will publish a pop theme issue in the near future. One can, then, no longer, as has been customary up until now, complain about pop being a neglected area in philosophical aesthetics; it is true, however, that research on aesthetics is still relatively underdeveloped.²

Abandoning the object

The most crucial act, when moving from traditional popular aesthetics to environment-oriented popular aesthetics, is the abandonment of the pre-determined, clearly defined aesthetic object. This also means the abandonment of a surprisingly persistent work-centric attitude that largely originates in the modernistic art discourse and that, I think, to a great extent, defines the thinking of, for example, Noël Carroll and David Novitz.

One of the key ideas in environmental aesthetics is that if we observe, for example, a natural landscape, there is no predetermined entity on which we should fix our attention.³ It is for each of us to decide what to focus on and from which point of view. In other words, there is no single canonized tradition of observation. This, of course, does not mean that no common established practices exist, for example, for observing particular landscapes, or that these practices do not also govern the ways in which other landscapes are observed; in Finland, we only need to think, for example, of the landscapes in the Koli national park, and how they are reflected in our culture. However, despite these common established practices, we have a lot of freedom in choosing how we observe things. When in a forest, we can make aesthetic observations about something with a very broad scope, for example, about everything that we see at a given moment. Equally well, however, we can focus on examining a single pine tree or a piece of its bark. And it is equally appropriate to examine a piece of bark with a magnifying glass or a microscope. It is for us to decide how we delimit our observation and what its scope is, and in this sense, there is no incorrect approach.

In addition to having freedom in delimitation and scope, we need to note that even when we pick an object to observe in nature, its boundaries with other possible adjacent objects are often quite blurred and unclear. Where does a landscape end? Where does a blueberry brush or a Yellowfoot patch begin? Where does the open lake begin and end? If we view things on a very small scale, the problem of boundaries becomes radically more difficult. Objects in nature lack (institutional) frames. Then there is the tricky additional question of where and how a natural environment changes into a cultural one.

If we think about the pop world, at first glance, it seems like it is full of works, objects with predetermined boundaries, that have institutionalized frames or conventions that define how the works should be received, in the same way as those that define the reception of high art. There are movies, songs, albums, posters, concerts, and so on. It is precisely objects like these that most writers, unquestioningly, draw attention to, and the examples given in connection with the theories are, almost without exception, specific named works. The environmental alternative, however, takes a different approach. I think I am justified in claiming that individ-

ual works do not necessarily hold a special position with the people consuming, experiencing, or even producing popular art, nor can they be unambiguously delimited. At the most, the works appear as hill-like formations in a broader landscape.

Let us, for a moment, consider an average Friday night in any disco or club. The DJ is playing and mixing songs, some of which are familiar to the audience, while others are not. People dance, drink, smoke, and talk to each other. Color, laser and strobe lights are flashing, and the smoke from machines and cigarettes clouds the visual field. Depending on where we are, the clients' clothing and appearance vary. If we are in a drum and bass place, people are not likely to be wearing much clothing, because they are there to dance: T-shirts, jeans, short skirts, tops, and so on, are popular, and some people even take off what little they have on, as the evening draws on. Water is consumed in large quantities.

Where should we fix our attention? On the music? If so, on which version of a particular song? The one played by the DJ may not be the one I have heard before. Should we take into account the sound effects added by the DJ? And what are the boundaries of a song when combined and overlapping with other songs in the mix? Or is the appropriate object to observe the DJ's entire set? Is it part of the music that I can feel the thump of the bass through the floor in my feet, and also directly in my body? Or why talk about music, if I am really interested in the lights, the movements of the people or the decor of the space? Or their relationship with the music? Or the shoes of the person dancing next to me, or a detail in their tattoo? There is nothing forcing me to focus on a specific part or level of my environment: like in other places, I can take different approaches, and none of them are wrong.

It is, of course, true that people do not always listen to, for example, pop music in as engrossing an environment as a club, but they consume it at home or in the car. When they do so, a specific piece of music, a single song, such as the Verve's *Bitter Sweet Symphony*, may inevitably attract all the attention. However, this does not refute the usefulness of the environmental approach, because in this case, too, we are justified in seeing this specific object as part of a larger whole. We can easily broaden our field of observation to include, say, album covers, clothes, and beyond; in the case of *Bitter Sweet Symphony*, even car commercials and cars.

Let us take another example and consider, for a moment, the 15-year-olds skateboarding outside the Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art. The music playing in the background may be by Red Hot Chili Peppers, the Beastie Boys, or some other group or artist that may remain unknown to passers-by. Boys, and the odd girl, are doing tricks on skateboards, which enthusiasts can quickly analyze, based on their characteristics, such as size, wheels, graphics, and so on. The young people are wearing clothes and shoes by Airwalk, Fila, Nike, Big Star and

Nose, and they talk in typical Helsinki accents. The gestures and postures are carefully considered, and while appropriate for the activity, they are also stylized, both on and off the skateboard. It is quite obvious that the different parts form an integrated whole. It is also important to note that all the above is also intertextually linked to other things that are not visible, or directly present, at this very moment: graffiti, snowboarding, roller skating, specific stores and magazines, fast food, and so on. All of this is easily triggered, even if one is listening to Chili Peppers' *One Hot Minute* at home. Where should we fix our attention, and where should we stop our wandering observation? The choice is free.

Pop phenomena exist as symbiotic compounds like these. Music is inevitably associated with clothes, album covers, videos, dance styles, artists, restaurants, magazines, websites, stores, sports, radio stations and travel destinations. They are not ancillary to the music, but equally important parts of the whole or the environment in which the music appears. Particularly with popular phenomena, it often, though not always, seems that a part of the environment is too unimportant to be of interest on its own, and it only becomes aesthetically significant when connected to a broader contextual network, which then shines and pulsates as a whole. How would parts of the Spice Girls, Leningrad Cowboys, or Madonna machines work, if detached from the whole?⁴

It is obvious that large wholes that simply cannot even be delimited do not lend themselves to comprehensive analysis. We have to choose a part. For example, Shusterman, when discussing rap culture, mainly focuses on the lyrics, or approaches the whole rap phenomenon with an emphasis on the lyrics, while at the same time taking into account and mentioning other aspects. Yet rap, Shusterman's favorite topic, clearly does not work only on the level of lyrics, but also on many other levels. If the lyrics were the hard core of rap, it is unlikely that songs performed in a 'Bronx accent', incomprehensible to the average Finn, would generate much interest in this part of the world. Yet they do, and what is fascinating is to explore the thing in them that hip-hoppers from Espoo identify with, and the type of environment they are parts of.

Shusterman's emphasis on the lyrics is, of course, no error, even though he has been criticized for being 'one-sided'. Following the same logic, it would be an error to examine a natural environment focusing specifically on its visual aspects. It is not an error, it is a choice. What is an error is if we naively assume, even if only implicitly, that the world of the popular is occupied by fixed objects, to which we, then, have a specific relationship.⁵ The error is not only in discussing a part of an environment, because this is inevitably what happens. The error is in not seeing the part as an aspect of a larger whole, and showing that.

Constant change

Environmental aesthetics emphasize constant change in the environment and its treatment as a process. A natural environment changes according to the season, aging from one week or year to the next, some parts disappearing, and something new emerging. It is never completed and never stops. In this sense, too, it is for the observer of nature to determine what they focus on. They have to decide what period in the time continuum they observe, and acknowledge how the chosen period relates to others. There are no permanent objects.

The same holds true for popular culture. Let us return to the drum and bass club, even though we could just as well go see an ice-hockey match or surf the internet. People come and go, the music thunders as the songs change, the volume increases over the evening, people are becoming intoxicated. Nothing stays exactly the same, and there is no returning to earlier moments; and the next day, the entire environment will, again, be different. For an observer wanting to grasp the whole, no single point in time is more 'right' than another. Tomorrow, the skateboarders will be somewhere else, in a different formation, wearing different clothes. Of course, this does not mean that consumers of popular culture would not be seeking similar *experiences*, from one club night to the next, and in order to achieve this, most of the key elements in the environment need to stay more or less the same. There is permanence on that level. This, however, will not prevent change in the overall environment.

Then there is the question of longer time periods. Many clubs live for a few months, and after that, they are gone. The same applies to magazines, record labels and clothing stores. Entire lifestyle trends emerge, live for a period, and then die off, perhaps leaving behind traces for the next trends to build on. Fashions change and evolve constantly, and keeping track of them is a full-time occupation. People get older. It is impossible to stop progress. (Perhaps this is precisely why the presentation of popular art in museums often seems so odd.)

One counter-argument is that, for example, recordings and prints of films, especially in digital form, remain the same, and you can return to them again and again. They do not change or evolve. This *may*, in a sense, be true,⁶ but if we refer to specific recordings, we are right back to the work-centric way of thinking, which does not take into account larger wholes. The wholes, again, are inevitably constantly evolving processes.

Large-scale environmental processes are not controlled by anyone, nor are they anyone's works. One can, of course, say that there are parts of the environment that are controlled by someone. DJs can decide their own sets and any changes in it. However, they cannot control the whole environment, because any unpredictable variables may enter into it. (We do not even have to go into the problems of free will.) There may be technical glitches, too few clients,

or too many clients, to produce the desired ambience, and there may be surprises in human interaction. Individual recordings can be viewed as being relatively controlled wholes, while entire environments cannot, because there is not, nor can there be, any author or person responsible for them.

An environment does not just exist – it emerges, and, when considered from a work-centric perspective, the emergence and change can easily go unnoticed.

Multi-sensory experience

You can look at a forest, but you can also feel, smell or listen to it; you are free to observe and sense it in the way you see fit. You are drawn to smell the marsh tea, to stroke a tussock of moss, to run on a natural path and test the bounce of the ground, to listen to the shriek of the gulls over the windy sea, and to taste the salt.

And at the club? The lights, the clothes, the movement tease the eye, while the music does the same for the ear and the touch. There is a rich olfactory world: smoke machine smoke, tobacco, perfume, alcohol, sweat, stuffy air, starkly contrasted with the freshness of the air outside in the early hours of the morning, when leaving. You can taste the water, sweat, tobacco, alcohol, and maybe someone's lips and tongue in your mouth. Moving to the rhythm is, in itself, a multi-sensory experience, with a wet shirt clinging to your back. The exhaustion and numbing volume dull all the senses, which makes experiencing the environment very different from, say, taking a solitary rowing trip, when feeling fresh. Skateboarding, tango-dancing, sitting in a pub, watching an ice-hockey match, walking in Moomin World, or becoming immersed in the world of the Spice Girls all form their own multi-sensory experiential wholes. There is no reason to elevate one sensory mode over the others, to make it primary. In the world of art, however, favoring a specific sense or senses is often, still, a key premise.

This may lead you to ask: is, for example, pop music not expressly listened to, sensed through the ears and defined using auditory concepts? There is no doubt that the experience can be limited to being *primarily* auditory. However, it is another thing whether experiencing music typically is like this and whether it needs to be. The first question could possibly be resolved through empirical studies, but when you think about all the extra-musical stuff in popular culture, you can at least assume that people are not typically just listening to music, even at home. The second question, however, is perhaps more important. Although music has, in many cases, been specifically created to be listened to, this does not necessitate limiting the experience to a specific sensory mode, for the simple reason that, in the broader environment, music is just one aspect, part, level or element. There is nothing to prevent people from adopt-

ing a broader perspective and also drawing attention to other issues; on the contrary, there are many incentives for doing this. Of course, this does not mean that in specific cases, a specific sense or senses would not dominate or be practically indispensable: it is impossible for the blind to watch movies. But even those who were born blind are unlikely to have escaped, for example, the Titanic phenomenon, which has woven its way into all sensory modes, even in the form of theme meals.

Furthermore, it is, of course, not unambiguous, whether music or any other activity is ultimately unisensory, and in what manner. Profound questions that explore the phenomenon of synesthesia include: In what way do sensory modes influence each other? Is it at all meaningful to try to keep the modes separate? Whatever the answers, in experiences of the environment, all the senses are relevant, either together and/or separately. From the point of view of marketing, an integral part of pop phenomena, the reasoning is probably also that the multi-sensory popular work packages are believed to have a more intense effect on the experiencers than works or events that only stimulate some of the senses. It is no coincidence that the Moomin books have turned into Moomin World and spawned Disney-style merchandise. For many, a movie evening is not complete without popcorn.

When talking about different sensory modes, it is worth noting that each of these has its own relationship with the things discussed above: delimiting a part of the environment to become the object of observation takes place differently for the senses of sight and smell, and the changing of the environment is different, depending on whether you are observing it by listening, touching, or in some other way. Engagement with the environment, which I will discuss next, is also different depending on the sensory mode involved. However, I will not discuss these subtleties any further here.⁷

Engagement with the environment

Environmental aesthetics has stressed that environments are not to be observed from the outside, but through the observer who is engaged with them. Someone who has perhaps taken this idea furthest is Arnold Berleant, whose suggestion is that the limit, and perhaps the difference, between the self and the environment should be completely obliterated. Even if we did not go that far, the basic idea is the same: we engage with our environments, and through engagement, influence them, which, in turn, influences the self. Furthermore, depending on our own activity and movement, our perspective of the environment also changes constantly.

Again, the same also holds true for the pop environment. When dancing or just standing around at a club, everyone is part of the environment, and, in some respects, the boundary

between the self and the environment does, indeed, disappear. Of course, the relationship is not quite as total as it is with nature in general, in the sense that we are always inevitably, and inescapably, part of nature. We can always walk out of a club. However, as long as we are at the club, we are part of it. When breathing in smoke or drinking, we are absorbing parts of the environment, and the music literally invades our bodies and makes them vibrate. When dancing, we are inviting others to join in, and the behavior of the dancing mass of people affects what the DJ will play next. Just by being present, we are part of the emerging event, which some part of the whole can be observing. Even by leaving, we change the environment.

If we so wish, we can distinguish between levels of engagement. Firstly – and, to some extent, in parallel with the discussion on the relative depth or superficiality of engagement in the aesthetics of nature – people are engaged with popular environments either by being profound and knowledgeable about them, through their lifestyle (as a fan or a buff), or by moving about in a tourist role, being quite ignorant of them, but stopping and staring at things that seem random and irrelevant to an expert. Yet neither extreme, nor a middle ground somewhere between them, can be considered wrong as an aesthetic approach.

Secondly, it is true that popular culture firmly promotes the star phenomena: stars are those who truly create works of popular culture, its masterpieces. We could think of stars as being those who are the real engaged creators of environments in popular culture or who, at least, have a more significant role in them than others. This means that, in popular culture, the dictatorship of the stage, which Rousseau criticized, would prevail over carnivalesque democracy. It is certain that, in terms of significance and influence, there are stronger and weaker parts within the popular environment, as in the natural environment. A Rolling Stones concert is built around the Rolling Stones, with the main focus on the rocking grandpas. However, if there was no audience engaged in interaction with them, and if the band was performing to an empty arena, the concert would not be the same. It should also be noted that not even the biggest star can, through their action, replace the audience's experiences of the environment, because everyone is personally engaged with the environment and observes it from their own personal perspective.

We should not, however, push the idea of engagement too far, and there are certainly different levels of engagement. Dancing at a club is probably more intense and complex in terms of engagement than watching a movie – unless we are talking about *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. The opportunities people have to *influence* the environment are often, in many ways, quite non-existent. If I am watching MTV, I am certainly engaged with a specific (media)

environment, but I have little power to influence what is shown on the TV screen, even with all the feedback systems.

Conclusion

I have analyzed phenomena in popular culture through environmental aesthetics, with a particular emphasis on similarity across domains. It would require another article to analyze the differences between domains; not everything that is important in environmental aesthetics is automatically suited to popular culture. Let me just point out a couple of things that are worth considering.

Firstly, environmental-ethical considerations take center stage in the debate on natural environments, also in connection with aesthetics; ethics and aesthetics cannot be separated. Perhaps these considerations *should* also be important in the debate on popular culture but, at least for now, they are not. Gender-ethical considerations are occasionally included.

Secondly, environmental aesthetics has, in a significant way, often been considered to be research of the real world, whereas, in art aesthetics, fiction plays an important role. In this division, popular culture seems to form some kind of an interesting hybrid. The drum and bass club is undoubtedly part of the real world, but, at the same time, there are a great number of fictional and (half-)mythical characters and roles at play: the DJ has a stage name, the gendered clothing reflects the fictional world of videos and magazines, and the advertisements create their own stories that are carried over to the clothes and beverages. This is not to suggest that there would not be different levels of fictionality in popular culture. But is there a variety that is all real-life? And what would that mean?

Thirdly, environmental aesthetics has, in terms of values, been considered to be the opposite of the modernist-avant-garde art aesthetics in the sense that, within it, it is not important or really even meaningful to reflect on the way in which aesthetic objects are, or could be, novel or creative. It is not important, because the value and interest are generated in another way. A good environment can be typical, natural, balanced or lush; it does not have to be novel. Also in this respect, popular aesthetics seems like a hybrid: the rapid fluctuations in fashion seem to stress the search for something new, as in art, but, on the other hand, the changes are often predictable – as in the cycle of the seasons. Novelty is not unpredictability, and people in popular culture often opt for easy and predictable solutions. This, however, is not a shortcoming: part of the charm lies precisely in the familiarity, safety, and formulaic solutions.⁸

This article was first published in Finnish in *Niin & Näin*, 1/1999, pp. 52-57.

¹ The problems in drawing boundaries and the necessity of boundaries are discussed, for example, in Carroll 1998, Haapala 1997 and Novitz 1992.

² To be absolutely clear, I would like to emphasize that I am only discussing research on popular culture carried out within philosophical aesthetics. I do not know enough about, for example, sociological research to be able to systematically comment on it. The sociological writings I am familiar with, including Simon Frith's *Rockin potku (Sound Effects)*, Lawrence Grossberg's *Mielihyvän kytkenät* (selected writings translated into Finnish), Dick Hebdige's *Subculture* and Greil Marcus' *Lipstick Traces*, do not use an environment-centric approach like the one I have set out here, although they do naturally outline environments and their workings from a social and communal perspective. I would like to add that, although my focus in this article is on recent studies, popular aesthetics has, of course, been discussed previously by, for example, Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno. The history of popular aesthetics has been discussed in detail by, for example, Carroll 1998.

³ This remark is not intended to suggest that aesthetics of the environment and aesthetics of nature are the same. However, the ideas put forward in aesthetics of nature aptly encapsulate the central observations made in this article.

⁴ Then again, the research on popular music has occasionally been criticized for ignoring the actual music and focusing on everything else (for example, Alexei Monroe 1998). Focusing on music, and music only, would, however, be an equally distorted approach.

⁵ In fact, even the seemingly liberating statement that the same (popular) works are interpreted in different ways in different contexts (compare, for example, the naive and gay interpretations of Pet Shop Boys songs and videos) is readily based on the idea of a specific work that is just consumed in different ways.

⁶ However, it would not be easy to say in what sense, for example, the permanence or invariability of a digital recording is true, because its ontological identity is not easy to describe. The relationship between, for example, the recording and the equipment used to listen to it, or between the recording and the listening in general, is unclear. What remains the same?

⁷ Talking about multi-sensory experience emphasizes sensibility, or sensory perception, and reminds us that our sensory side cannot be conclusively verbalized or conceptualized. The somatic aspects of experience, specifically in conjunction with popular phenomena, have been raised by Shusterman 1992. I have discussed the characteristics of 'quiet' or 'tacit' aesthetics in more detail in Naukkarinen 1998. I would like to add that (multi-)sensory experience, like the other themes presented in this article, comes close to those views of man's being in the world that are prevalent in phenomenology, and phenomenological anthropology in particular (for example, Laine and Kuhmonen 1995). Further explorations into this link are not possible in this paper, but considering the current position of phenomenology in Finnish philosophical debate – maybe we could already speak of 'fennomenology' – this is probably just as well. It is interesting to see what will become the next, annoyingly ubiquitous philosophical trend – pragmatism?

⁸ Thanks to: Arto Haapala, Mika Saavalainen, Aleksi Salokannel and Jyri Vuorinen.

Selected bibliography

Noël Carroll, *A Philosophy of Mass Art*. Clarendon Press, Oxford 1998.

Simon Frith, *Rockin potku; Nuorisokulttuuri ja musiikkiteollisuus (Sound Effects)*. Suomen etnomusikologinen seura ry:n julkaisuja 1 (Finnish Society for Ethnomusicology Publications 1). Vastapaino, Tampere 1988.

Theodore Gracyk, *Rhythm and Noise; An Aesthetics of Rock*. I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd Publishers, London and New York 1996.

Lawrence Grossberg, *Mielihyvän kytkennät; Risteilyjä populaarikulttuurissa* ('Connected Pleasures; Cruising in Popular Culture'). Vastapaino, Tampere 1995.

Arto Haapala, *Alemmat ja ylemmät* ('The High and the Low'). In O.Immonen and J.Mykkänen (eds.), *Mäkihypyn muotooppi ja muita kirjoituksia populaaritaiteista* ('The Morphology of Ski Jumping and Other Writings on Popular Arts'). Kansainvälinen soveltavan estetiikan instituutti (International Institute of Applied Aesthetics), Lahti 1997, pp.155-165.

Arto Haapala, Martti Honkanen, Veikko Rantala (eds.), *Ympäristö, arkkitehtuuri, estetiikka* ('The Environment, Architecture and Aesthetics'). Yliopistopaino, Helsinki 1995.

Timo Laine, Petri Kuhmonen, *Filosofinen antropologia; Ihmisen kokonaisuutta etsimässä* ('Philosophical Anthropology; In Search of Human Wholeness'). Atena kustannus oy, Jyväskylä 1995.

Alexei Monroe, *Test Signals: Towards an Aesthetics of Electronica*. Presentation, XIVth International Congress of Aesthetics, Ljubljana, Slovenia, from 1 to 5 September 1998.

Ossi Naukkarinen, *Aesthetics of the Unavoidable; Aesthetic Variations in Human Appearance*. International Institute of Applied Aesthetics, Lahti 1998.

David Novitz, *The Boundaries of Art*. Temple University Press, Philadelphia 1992.

Sung-Bong Park, *An Aesthetics of the Popular Arts; An Approach to the Popular Arts from the Aesthetic Point of View*. Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, Aesthetica Upsaliensia 5. Uppsala 1993.

Yrjö Sepänmaa (ed.), *Alligaattorin hymy; Ympäristöestetiikan uusi aalto* ('Alligator Smile. The New Wave of Environmental Aesthetics'). Helsingin yliopisto, Lahden tutkimus- ja koulutuskeskus (The Lahti Research and Training Centre of the University of Helsinki), Lahti 1994.

Richard Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics; Living Beauty, Rethinking Art*. Blackwell, Oxford and Cambridge, 1992.

Richard Shusterman, *Practicing Philosophy; Pragmatism and the Philosophical Life*. Routledge, New York and London 1997.