Liquid art: Embracing Temporary Aesthetics

Marketing

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Abstract

Today's postmodern consumer culture is characterized by fast pace, continuous changes, power of consumers and merging roles of production and consumption. There is more unlimited information with less emphasis on the meaning. However, one thing that hasn't changed is consumers' need for self-actualization - both through personal artistic expressions and as a member of a community.

This qualitative research belongs to the postmodern paradigm and the category of interpretive research. The research is conducted in a form a video ethnography that included interviews and observations. The interviewees were Finnish street art and graffiti artists who each do their legal art regularly for commercial or noncommercial purposes. The data, which consisted of filmed interviews and documentation of painting activities, was analyzed and reflected to paradigm of liberatory postmodernism.

This research views artistic self-actualization from postmodern consumer culture perspective focusing on the subjective outlooks on life and actors within it. The research belongs to the consumer culture theory and views a consumer as a participant of a subculture drawing from the theories of identity construction as subculture member, aesthetics and conceptual melancholy. An ethnographic research enables to get insight and subjective understanding of the personal process of creating art and carrying out self-actualization.

Keywords Liberatory postmodernism, liquidity, temporary art, aesthetics, self-actualization, subcultures, graffiti culture

Surface and structure:

1. INTRODUCTION

Foreword

Despite the culture or era, individuals have always had a need for self-actualization and have discovered different ways to express themselves in a community. Arts have been part of the concept of "culture" from the beginning; the Oxford dictionary defines the word culture as "The arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement regarded collectively". However, what has been considered *art* has changed over the times. For a long time in everyday life *art* used to refer to fine arts that may be seen in art galleries or on the stage of a theatre. In his book *Distinction,* Pierre Bourdieu (1984) claimed only few decades ago that every art piece or exhibition used to be aimed for only a specific social class and, moreover, was accepted primarily (or only) by that class. This way could be seen that art works as the means for a certain social class, such as elite, to distinguish themselves from the others and the key word was *taste*. Furthermore, sociologist Georg Simmel (1905) argued that culture and consumption were closely tied together and consumption actually often determined consumers' values and experiences regarding life and being in general.

However, in his book *Culture in a liquid modern world* sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (2013) claims that times have changed: in this postmodern era, in the 21st century consuming a certain type of art doesn't have anymore the same symbolic meanings as it used to. Furthermore, different social classes cannot be recognized anymore solely based on their taste of art or ways of consuming but instead have been proved to consume many of the same

goods and participate in same events (Holt, 1998). It could be even argued that a sign of being culturally educated today is knowledge of multiple cultures and types of art, not belonging strictly to high class only. People may consume fine art in art galleries one day and enjoy street art the next just as they may have dinner at the finest gourmet restaurant during the weekend and enjoy experiencing low-cost ethnic street food from a food truck during the week. Or, furthermore, there have even been emerging counter movements to the exceeding consuming and today anyone can be a customer of, for example, a cheap second hand shop. Popular culture has become an acknowledged part of culture and arts, just as fine art at the galleries has been for long. Postmodern artists like Andy Warhol have disrupted the traditional views on art and made the line between fine art and easily duplicable kitsch-like art impossible to draw. As Bauman (2013, p.3) puts it, the consumer culture today is about "a readiness to consume everything against finicky selectiveness". People may (and do) still construct their identity based on what and how they consume (Morgan & Pritchard 1998; Moisio et al. 2004) but according to Bauman and Holt, for example, consuming of only certain type of goods is no longer in fashion (nor a sign of a social class).

Bauman (2013, p.11) describes the time we live (which is often referred by other authors as 'postmodernity') as a *liquid modernity*; what makes it 'liquid' is "its self-propelling, self-intensifying, compulsive and obsessive 'modernization', as a result of which, like liquid, none of the consecutive forms of social life is able to maintain its shape for long". In other words, everything is constantly changing and developing and thus everything is temporary. The mindset of the people living in urban environment today differs from the one of the previous generations from a decade ago. Nothing lasts forever, nor has to last. Whether it's some physical possession, enjoyable holiday or art creation. According to modern nomadism people don't feel tied to a one place anymore due to materialistic possessions (Bardhi & al. 2012), nor does their birthplace or premises define their life as it used to at some point. This constant change and improvement has brought endless possibilities but at the same time, as the dark side, it's possible that it has created an unanchored melancholy and mood set for always searching for something more. However, it may also be that during these constantly changing times consumers form even deeper meanings for the communities and subcultures they belong to, in order to search some consistency.

Consumer culture, behavior, habits and interests change and evolve constantly. Today's artistic and cultural sphere could be described as rather liberal and the audiences, as Bauman claimed, become more and more open to different art forms. As an example of a new, postmodern art form and a type of temporary aesthetics I have concentrated in this research on legal graffiti and street art in Finland. When it comes to the graffiti culture in Finland, we are living an interesting era of the changing nature of legal graffiti art and sort of the breakthrough face of its position in art and urban culture (Helin, 2014). Legal walls have appeared for only around five years and legal graffiti art is still finding its final form yet gaining recognition constantly. In contrary of how Bourdieu described every artistic offering to be addressed only to a specific audience and social class, graffiti is usually done in public space and can be seen by anyone who walks by it. Also, today's legal graffiti isn't perhaps as strongly "loaded" with political messages as is the reputation of illegal one but may be seen as an urban aesthetics and a public piece of art. Today's legal graffiti borrows its themes often from popular culture and, thus, expects at least some sort of cultural knowledge from the viewer. However, this does not limit the audience only to a certain social class. Still, legal graffiti art seems to be a controversial topic and the painters need to work constantly in order to get permissions and facilities to work on what they love to do.

Research info

Methodology

The methodological principles I am following in this study are those of liberatory postmodernism reflected to consumer culture theory, aesthetics and conceptual melancholy. First, I am following the principle of *liberatory postmodernism*, which is a concept formed by Firat & Venkatesh (1995) and is a theoretical position of postmodernism. As they explain, liberatory postmodernism can be described being in between of critical postmodernism and celebratory postmodernism; the writers "believe in the liberating potentials of the postmodern conditions and postmodernist ideas regarding discourse and epistemology" (p.244). Furthermore, the base for Firat and Venkatesh's concept comes from the exposing

limitations of metanarratives and suggesting alternative visions of consumption processes. Essential is the mistrust of metanarratives that aim to function as universal narratives like history or knowledge but instead concentrating on small local narratives, which bring focus to individuals and smaller events. This view is also typical to postmodern era in general: "Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives" (Lyotard, 1984).

Supporting the idea of concentrating on local narratives instead of one universal truth of metanarrative, I follow the principles of consumer culture theory and try to familiarize myself with a subculture and their shared meanings and behavior. By following and interviewing a few members of a subculture, I try to form local narratives of them and their perceptions of the culture and world around them. The aim is not to find universal truths about consumers but rather reflecting the local narratives to today's consumer culture.

Characteristic to the postmodern era the fast changes, continuously increasing amount of information and *ecstasy of communication* (referring to Baudrillard's thoughts) have made the actions and information less meaningful. This era of people feeling less connected to a certain place or finding their actions less significant have led to the feeling of conceptual melancholy. In this research I reflect the stories of the followed artists to the concepts of (artistic) struggles of creation, motivation and sense of self-actualization in life.

"Liberated into the online virtual spaces through digitalization, video media has become an omnipresent part of our lives" (Hietanen, 2012 p.2). Staying truthful to Bauman's proposal of constantly changing world and customs within it, I have chosen to conduct this study following an alternative means and methods. In addition to this written report, as audiovisual material has become permanent part of modern day consumer's life anyway, the second part of my research is conducted as a composition of videos that I have filmed in the field of graffiti culture. This video ethnographic research consists of interviews and observations done while spending time with the graffiti artists in different events. The data was gathered during 2014-2015. I have chosen this method, as I believe that audio-visual data collection is more informative compared to other methods plus the video document as an end product can sometimes tell more than just a written report. Also, videographic methods have been found

promising in marketing and consumer research (Belk & Kozinets, 2005) and as technology develops the means for that become more and more accessible to anyone. I have interviewed several times four graffiti/street art artists and followed their life while participating in different graffiti painting events and gatherings. The artists I have selected for this study differ from each other by style and backgrounds but represent more or less the same graffiti subculture group in Helsinki.

Background

Graffiti art is an interesting theme as it can still be seen as an unconventional art form (if neglected to be an art form at all). In this thesis I will present the literature of themes related to postmodern art culture, such as liquid possessions, art and aesthetics and melancholy related to the temporariness of these times, as well as literature related to subcultures of different consumer cultures, such as graffiti culture and other groups built around a certain activity. According to spirit of the age, legal graffiti art is a good example of a postmodern art form that has gained its respect and recognition only within last years. In Finland legal graffiti is rather new phenomena, at least compared to bigger capital cities like Berlin, New York, and Sao Paolo, for example, that have supported vivid street art culture for decades. However, despite the growing acceptance, in Finland graffiti art is mainly done on very temporary surfaces like construction site walls and demolition houses before their final wipe out. Still, the artists find even these permissions to paint as a minor victory (Helin, 2012). Getting each permission is a battle but the urge to paint is stronger than the hassle before it. Even if the end result might stay there for hours, not weeks, let alone years. Furthermore, it's impossible to tell what is the state of legal graffiti in another five years.

Motives

As the consumer culture seems to keep rolling with growing pace, the question of temporariness is an interesting one. At the same time people try to find meanings in what they do, for example in art and other self-actualization activities. The combination of these two and the concept of liquid art describe well the postmodern consumer culture and the

contradictions within it. The objectives of this ethnography are to find out how the interviewed artists comprehend their temporary art and the (un)conscious motives of doing it. Hopefully we will obtain more understanding of the consumer culture and the stand on self-actualization and the end product of it.

As the identity of a consumer consists on personal, individual attributes and worldview as well as reflecting these attributes to others around and forming a picture of oneself as part of community, I also have divided this study roughly in two sections: first "The Mindset" chapter presents the nature of today's postmodern consumer culture and the issues that affect single consumer's identity and ideologies. The second part "The Social aspect" represents more the current literature of subcultures and ethnographic research among them. Finally, to conclude, I try to explain how members of a community behave, experience and give meanings to the world around them, in relation to people around them.

Furthermore, I want to emphasize that I myself, am no expert when it comes to graffiti art, nor want to be presented as one. My only motive is to familiarize myself with an interesting art related subculture that happened to be very topical and suit well to the broader concept of postmodern consumer culture. I follow the specific artists and view them as a part of their community and broader subculture and simply try to find out why they do what they do and what is the thing about temporary art, and in this case, graffiti art. In addition, as the objective of this study isn't making a definition for what graffiti art is and isn't, I limit and simplify the vast jungle of terms and opinions related to the graffiti and street art culture, and in this research I will call the art done with spray cans as "graffiti art" without drawing the line between graffiti and street art. Although the theme of what counts as graffiti art is subjective and thus an interesting qualitative question, I leave the pondering of that question to further research and concentrate on each artist's thoughts about their art without taking a stand weather it is graffiti art, street art or just traditional visual art depending on if it's done legally, with spray paint or markers and on public space or on a private wall.

The motive for selecting these research methods and especially conducting the thesis partly in an alternative media supports the claims of the whole thesis itself: world is changing and behavior will or should change along it. Qualitative postmodernist research does not support

finding generalizations in quantity but rather investigating individuals' viewpoints; not only considering the interviewed individuals but also the researcher(s). Visual ethnography differs from documentary film theory for example in the role of the filmmaker: in visual ethnography it is always reflexive (de Valck, Rokka & Hietanen, 2009). In other words, visual ethnography does not aim to produce objective "truth" about reality but instead showing knowledge through ethnographer's lenses. Furthermore, I considered that visual form of media would support better this research that ponders visual questions and actions of creativity. Belk & Kozinets (2005, p. 138) who speak for videography in marketing research stated: "What this range of creative possibilities underscores is that if our written papers invoke the mantle of "science", our videographic productions may be as likely to invoke the mantle of "art". This is not a bad thing and it is likely unfortunate that we fail to put more art into our often formulaic written work."

Research question

In this research I investigate how consumers in today's rapidly changing world, which consists more and more of all things temporary, view their behavior and actions while belonging into a subculture. I examine the motives for their self-actualization processes where the end product is only barely physical never let consistent. Based on these interests of mine, I form the research question to be:

What are the motives and meanings of self-actualization when creating temporary art?

As an example of self expressing consumers I've documented life and work of Finnish graffiti/street art artists. I have concentrated on the capital area of Helsinki and four chosen individuals to represent the subculture in question.

2. THE MINDSET - From solid to liquid

Postmodern consumer culture

> "What a man can be, he must be. This need we call self-actualization."
>
> -Abraham Maslow

Cultural perspective

The culture today is created by consumers who consume and produce simultaneously in a fast changing environment and built their identity and narrative through these actions (for example Firat & Venkatesh, 1995; Kozinets 2002; Schouten 1991). "Ours is a consumers' society, in which culture, in common with the rest of the world experienced by consumers, manifests itself as a repository of goods intended for consumption, all competing for the unbearably fleeting and distracted attention of potential clients, all trying to hold that attention for more than just blink of an eye" (Bauman, 2013, p. 14). Today's consumer culture is also less prone to authorities (Eronen & Pieniniemi, 2013) and consumers themselves have more and more power. Everybody has unlimited access to unlimited information and the atmosphere is open to different opinions and discussion. User generated contents are becoming more and more popular. Web pages like Wikipedia and Youtube are dependent on their users and companies like Uber and AirBnB have no infrastructure but actually offer consumers services produced by other consumers. Typical to postmodern consumer culture the clear roles are disappearing, since today "there is no natural distinction between consumption and production; they are one and the same, occurring simultaneously"

(Firat & Venkatesh, 1995, p.254). Marketers can't no longer tell consumers how to consume, but rather make suggestions. Or as Bauman (2013, p. 11) puts it "culture today consists of offers, not prohibitions; propositions, not norms". It is no longer clear or straightforward what becomes desired among consumers. The only thing in constant demand is continuous change.

The pace for change is fast. This postmodern era is characterized of discontinuity and disjunction (Drolet, 2008). Internet has made it possible for the consumer to get anything at any time of the day. It's not anymore only fast food but fast commodities too. The continuous fast change includes also change of mind in which case it is suitable that possessions are temporary, fashion as a good example of this. Donald Sull & Stefano Turconi (2008) wrote on their online article for Business Strategy Review: "Imagine customer preferences that can shift literally overnight, product lifecycles measured in weeks, and the value of your product plummeting if you miss the latest trend. Welcome to the world of fast fashion".

Considering that the culture in which consumers live in today is very different from a culture, say, 100 years ago, can be assumed that the way how consumers behave and form meanings for these actions has changed too. According to Arnould & Thompson (2005) consumer culture theory is a study of the consumers and their relationships, actions, and cultural meanings within their community. According to this view culture is the stage for action, experiences and meaning. Supporting the liberating postmodernism, CCT views cultural meanings not as universal metanarratives but rather smaller local narratives and thus numerous and fragmented, inconsistent meanings that change depending on the observed individual or group (Arnould & Thompson 2005; Schouten & McAlexander 1995). While studying a subculture of Star Trek fan clubs, Kozinets (2001) found that subculture bonding members together could even be a religion-like; "Stigma, social situation, and the need for legitimacy shape the diverse subcultures' consumption meanings and practices" (Kozinets, 2001, p. 67). Schouten & McAlexander (1995) researched the Harley-Davidson subculture, and studied the subculture participants, or consumers, as culture producers, in this case a biker culture built on Harley-Davidson brand community. This is an important view that reflects the postmodern consumer culture in general too: also as Bauman (2013) described, the power has moved to consumers who become producers themselves instead of being solely

the receiving end. However, another important finding is that in their further research, Martin, Schouten & McAlexander (2006) re-examined the Harley-Davidson ethnography through feminist theory and found some new motivations, behaviors and experiences of the subculture among the few female drivers. The conclusion was that like CCT and liberatory postmodernism suggest, there are in fact multiple authenticities, or local narratives that are based on subjective views of individuals.

The changing world changes not only consumers and their behavior but also markets and the communities built around them. Bardhi and her colleagues discovered in 2012 that brand communities in shared commodity groups differ from traditionally seen markets. Moreover, postmodernism has brought also counter-movements to traditional market places and formed so-called antimarket communities. While participating to non-ommercial festival Burning Man, Robert Kozinets (2002, p.20) discovered that "practices used at Burning Man to distance consumers from the market include discourses supporting communality and disparaging market logics, alternative exchange practices, and positioning consumption as self-expressive art." The study revealed numerous communal practices, which separate consumption from general concepts of efficiency and rationality. According to Kozinets, the participants create a temporary *hypercommunity* where they practice opposing social logics. The finding to the question "Can consumers escape the market" is that in order for it to happen the emancipatory must be comprehended temporarily and locally. I will take a closer look on the postmodern consumer communities within the subcultures later on this study.

In addition of creating temporary hypercommunities, consumers may drift to the state of hyper reality. Our world today is continuous creation of the present, especially through online media (Vattimo, 1992). The fast development of technology and everyday life actions moving to virtual world is prone to create hyper reality which an inability of consciousness to tell apart reality from a simulation of reality. To illustrate, hyperrealism as an art form refers to overly realistic looking (digital) paintings that they start to resemble photographs (Saraste, 2010). The origin of hyperrealism as an art movement draws from the ideas Baudrillard (1981), as the created digital painting is "a photo" of something that never existed, thus being a simulation of unreality. "What is experienced momentarily becomes the real, and the construction of this condition and its intensification constitute the hyperreal" (Firat &

Venkatesh, 1995, p. 252). The simulations of life "capture the imagination of a community, its members begin to behave in ways that authenticate the simulation so that it becomes the social reality of the community" (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995, p. 252).

Liquid possessions

Globalization and digitalization have affected also consumers' life dramatically. Not only does it affect in consumer behavior (or what we *do*), since most actions can now be done virtually, but the shift in culture has also affected our possessions (what we *own*). There has been, no doubt, an obvious shift occurring in people's relationship to material possessions during the past decades. Something that was once a meaningful (and even rare) possession placed on a pedestal can basically today be handled with the prefix 'fast'. That is a case of, for example, photographs. A century ago a photograph or self portrait was a well preserved possession or gift that was taken to the host family when visiting neighbors or relatives (Saraste, 2010) but in today's digital world you are able to not only multiply photos as much as you can which unavoidably causes some inflation in their perceived value, but also get rid of them with just one click. Or you can choose to use applications that get rid of the photos for you, just in few seconds. The shift in relationship to possessions comes together in the shift from litografia to Snapchat.

Material possessions have been recognized to work as an expression and extension of self for many decades (Arnould & Thompson 2005; Simmel 1905; Belk 1988). This kind of object attachment observes objects as more than plain materialism but a key to identity building instead (Belk 1988). The idea of "you are what you buy" reflects how consumers construct and maintain the identity based on their consuming habits. Consuming any product or service has more symbolic meaning than just the product itself. In 1991 John Schouten found that (especially in life transitions) identity reconstruction is built on possessions that anchor consumer's identities to something they feel attached to like a homeland. According to this statement material possessions are needed in creating, displaying, and altering the identity because of their symbolic meanings. However, concentrating on these same types of life transitions and mobility Fleura Bardhi and her colleagues (2012, p.1) argue that "an alternative relationship to possessions characterized by detachment and flexibility emerges,

which is termed liquid." While researching consumers' relationship to possessions among contemporary global nomadism Bardhi and her colleagues found three characteristics of a liquid relationship to possessions:

1) Situational value: Informants exhibit a flexible relationship to possessions, valuing them in each locale, rather than forming an enduring attachment over time and space

2) Use value: Emphasis on instrumental use-value rather than linking value

3) Immateriality: Portability and physical lightness of possessions are important features our informants value.

Based on these findings, consumers seem to value "rational" aspects of the possessions instead of deep symbolic value while embracing liquid nomadism lifestyle.

And not only when it comes to life transitions but also in general, consuming and shopping around in order to feel happier seems to be less and less effective. Psychological evidence has proved that the correlation between consumption and the experienced personal happiness is weak (Durning, 1993) and people appear to have noticed this as new movements such as downshifting become more popular. Consumers today seem to increasingly appreciate immaterial experiences over material. According to some theories (for example Frank, 1985) experiences have also proven to bring more happiness compared to material possessions, at least when the experience is a successful one (Nicolao et al. 2009). This theory is also supported by Holt (1998), who found that consumers in higher social classes (who had basic material needs covered) rather choose to consume experiences. Based on these findings could be thought that the future of consuming is moving towards treating ourselves with experiences and buying products only for their use-value. Moreover, new kinds of consumption models appear. In their other research Fleura Bardhi and Giana Eckhardt (2012) studied so called access-based consumption where the transaction occurs without any transfer of ownership happening. In other words, without receiving any possessions in the transactions and using only what you need, paying for example with hourly rate. They studied for example car sharing which is a good example as it has always been much more than just a medium to transport yourself from a place to another: the symbolic status related to a Ford differs from a Ferrari. The findings of Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012) are interesting as they

suggest that access-based products lack identification, and, in contrary to traditional owned products do not work as extended self. Furthermore they have less symbolic value and are used mainly for their use-value. Soon a Louis Vuitton might be just a bag and owning a car doesn't increase your status but renting one gets you from place to another.

Art & aesthetics

"Art is anything you can get away with"

-Marshall McLuhan

In everyday language word *aesthetics* often refers to some set of principles of what is considered as beautiful and thus appreciated for that reason. Art, for its part, is often taken as something with intrinsic (rather than just instrumental) value. According to Oxford dictionary the word art is "The expression or application of human creative skill and imagination, typically in a visual form such as painting or sculpture, producing works to be appreciated primarily for their beauty or emotional power". Furthermore, questions concerning aesthetics have formed its own branch in the literature of philosophy that discusses appreciation of beauty, nature of art and artistic taste. Immanuel Kant, in his book *Critique of Judgement* (1790), was one of the first ones who described aesthetics being the connection between art and life. According to Kant, aesthetic judgments are not related to definitions of truth and false. Instead, he claims that the feeling of aesthetics is totally unattached from objective knowledge. Furthermore, he argues that beauty is an event or process rather than an attribute: a flower isn't beautiful itself but the beauty happens in the encounter of the flower. Every case of beauty is something entirely new and thus "incommunicable: it cannot be copied and imitated, just as it cannot be couched in a formula and serve as a precept" (p. 177). Related to the experience brought by beauty, many postmodern writers wrote about the concept of *the sublime* (Lyotard, 1984; Drolet, 2008), which is a term strongly related to the theory of postmodern aesthetics and refers to the

experience of pleasurable anxiety that we might experience when confronting wild and powerful sights like, for example, view from a mountain. As the sublime is an aesthetic experience and a combination of two opposed feelings (enchantment and anxiety), it may be difficult to understand how to handle it.

However, later literature has noted that Kant's definition of beauty has two senses: it is emphasizing beauty as a feeling unattached form "truth" and on the other hand experience of beautiful and the sublime. Gilles Deleuze (1990) this problematic as "aesthetics suffers from a wrenching duality. On one hand, it designates the theory of sensibility as the form of possible experience; on the other hand, it designates the theory of art as the reflection of real experience. For these two meanings to be tied together, the conditions of experience in general must become conditions of real experience".

Furthermore, in the twentieth century many artists and writers, such as Jean-François Lyotard, Marshall McLuhan, Gilles Deleuze and Andy Warhol, have challenged existing perceptions of what is considered as beautiful and encouraged to reconsider beauty. Postmodern art field with its diverse contemporary art forms has broadened the scope of art and aesthetics. As the world changes and becomes more and more liquid the patterns of thinking and acting must change too. Jean-François Lyotard (1984) was one writer who often discussed the nature of postmodernity and aesthetics related to it. In his review of Lyotard's work Drolet (2008, p. 532) wrote, "For Lyotard, the state that characterizes the postmodern era, one of discontinuity and disjunction, is aesthetics". In 1951 André Malraux, a French novelist stated in his book *Les Voix du silence* "Art is a revolt, a protest against extinction" (p. 138). From this statement can be figured that art is seen as something long lasting and concrete that will stay even when the creator of it doesn't exist anymore. It was seen as something permanent in this temporary life. However, as typical to postmodern writers, Marshall McLuhan (1964) posed criticism to traditional beauty notions and rebelliously stated, "Art is anything you can get away with". Arts function isn't anymore to embrace beauty alone but to work as a medium send message and change the society. Moreover, he suggested that art functions as counter-environment that makes visible the points that are invisible about the society. Borrowing the ideas of McLuhan, also artist and graphic designer Andy Warhol continued to emphasize the changing role of art in a media society and became known for his easily multipliable and even expendable, thus rather temporary art.

The side product: Longing for more?

> "We live in a world where there is more and more information,
>
> and less and less meaning"
>
> -Jean Baudrillard

Melancholy liquidity

Each positive move has its dark side, even postmodern liberation moves (Boje, 2005). Typical to the postmodern era there is an oxymoron of never being able to reach the "goal" and final state of *enough* self-actualization, experiences and meaning as the goal keeps changing with the same pace of the gaining of the wanted objects. Much like for example American culture that constantly encourages to seek more happiness by being more beautiful, thin, adventurous and what not by consuming more material, diet pills and fame (Wilson, 2008). The goal is utopia: literally drawing from Greek word describing place that doesn't exist. It's a never-ending search for new and improved.

Thanks to the continuously developing technology the efficiency of work and production has increased exponentially and could, thus, satisfy all basic human needs (at least hypothetically) but as Bauman (2000) puts it, we will probably never have enough resources to satisfy all of people's desires. The society today is about creating needs, not fulfilling them. As the possibilities and resources grow so do the desires. Furthermore, it has been proved that increased options to choose from create unhappiness (Schwartz 2000, Iyengar and Lepper 2000). : Barry Schwartz, an American psychologist wrote in his book *The Paradox of Choice – Why More is Less* (2004) that more options to choose from increases person's anxiety, no matter if it's a everyday product like salad dressing on the supermarket shelf. Desmeules (2002, p. 16) proved there to be a negative correlation between customer satisfaction and

high-variety product strategy as "a focus on high-variety strategies could lead to instances of difficult and unpleasant decisions and result in consumer unhappiness".

David Boje (2005, p. 11) described fast developing virtual technologies as one of the biggest negative consequences of postmodernism: "In the rush to virtualize human interaction in cyberspace, redesign nature with biotechnology, and to become post-consumers with self-designed individualistic postmodern lifestyles, there are techno-consequences as horrifying as those found in modern predatory management and organization". Virtual actions replace physical face-to-face actions and different parts of life like work and free time are not tied in time and space anymore. For example virtual learning you can complete online when the time suits you. Expectedly, todays work forms distance working and other communication that happens via computers affects dramatically the nature of the interaction (Olson & Olson 2000). Hope Schau and Mary Gilly (2003) discovered multiple motivations for consumers to create content, like own webpage, online and thus new kind of possibilities to construct the self by associating themselves online with different symbols, material objects, and places. You can virtually become anyone you want to but does that make the physical "real" identity seem worse or better?

Also due to globalization and digitalization following and interacting with anyone in the world is possible. "We live in a world of communication - everyone gets information about everyone else. There is universal comparison and you don't just compare yourself with the people next door, you compare yourself to people all over the world and with what is being presented as the decent, proper and dignified life." Bauman (2000; http://www.theguardian.com/books/2003/apr/05/society). Not only is there now possibility to do whatever you want to in order to live a fulfilling life but there is a pressure to do it. It's not anymore about keeping up just with the Joneses as you can keep up with whole world. In the earlier days (or still in the third world countries) obtaining something you needed was more unambiguous. If explained after Maslow's hierarchy of needs the basic needs on the bottom are self explanatory: one has the physical needs such as need for food and warm clothes and need for safe environment and either these needs become fulfilled or not. As they do, they can move on to more abstract and social needs. On the top of the pyramid is placed

"self-actualization" which fulfillment isn't anymore easily explained - or furthermore, maybe even possible to fully obtain.

In his novel *The unbearable lightness of being* Milan Kundera (1984) represents the controversial thought of oblivion: everyone lives only once and what happens in life happens only once and will never happen again. And furthermore that which happens in one person's life has very low significance on a wider perspective in the universe. Thus, the *lightness* of being. This mindset challenges Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of eternal recurrence in which the notion is that the universe, including all of its occurrences, have already appeared and will reappear forever which creates the feeling of *heaviness* due to the decisions that are made. This concept of Nietzsche is related to the German saying *Einmal ist keinmal* where the direct translation could be "once doesn't count" or furthermore can be interpreted that one's occurrence is not significant since we only live once. The question that Kundera's character Tomáš is struggling with when thinking about his commitment to Theresa is that there is no way of knowing which decision is better, since there is no basis for comparison. This unbearable lightness and the thought of insignificance and unavoidable temporariness cause anxiety and melancholy. Or furthermore, when it comes to consumers the consumer culture suggests that addressing eternal loyalty to anything and anybody is foolish, since in this world new and appealing opportunities appear constantly (Bauman 2000). The question of commitment seems irrational as the culture encourages staying unattached to anything since everything will change eventually anyway.

The possibility to continuously find more "self-actualization" and meaning for life creates constant longing for something more which on its behalf creates dissatisfaction of the current state, or in other words, melancholy (Wilson, 2008). Sigmund Freud separated two types of feelings occurring from losing something: melancholy is often seen to differ from concrete mourning that can be directed to a certain loss. In the case of melancholia, one doesn't actually recognize what it is they've lost. As Slavoj Žižek (2000, p. 659) states, "Lack is not the same as loss". The real loss is not actually accessible to consciousness. According to him "Mourning is a kind of a betrayal" (p.658) and kills the lost object (again), while melancholy stays faithful to the lost object. Furthermore, "the mourner mourns the lost object and kills it a second time through symbolizing its loss, while the melancholic is not simply the one who

is unable to renounce the object but rather the one who kills the object a second time (treats it as lost) before the object is actually lost" (p.662). In other words, melancholy is vaguely feeling unhappy without being caused by any specific reason or loss that could be named. As Bauman (2000, p. 66) writes "The sentiment of 'being unhappy' is all too often diffuse and unanchored … one hopes to discover and locate the troubles which caused one's own unhappiness, attach to them a name, and so come to know where to look for ways of resisting or conquering them". According to Žižek, the melancholic denies the desertion of attachment to the lost object. It is an oxymoron, as there appears mourning of an object that isn't even lost yet. More over, "The melancholic link to the lost ethnic Object allows us to claim that we remain faithful to our ethnic roots while fully participating in the global capitalist game" (Žižek, 2000, p.659) (compare Lacanian distinction between Object and cause of desire). This idea of maintaining attachments to the lost object can be viewed the ethnic way where an ethnic group loses their culture as it disappears under a more dominant and wider culture or power, like capitalism. This way could be assumed that certain subcultures might feel even more strongly attached to their own traditions as subcultures or other smaller cultures like ones of ethnic groups begin to disappear and blend into bigger ones.

Lack of aesthetics

As Salvador Dalí once famously stated, "those who do not want to imitate anything, produce nothing". Fast production and duplications are increasing in the art world with same pace as culture is changing. New technologies make almost any art repeatable. This forces to reconsider the definitions and symbolic behavior related to art and beauty and as David Boje (2005, p. 12) puts it, "postmodern aesthetics, would look at competing aesthetics, not at 'beauty' but at ways ideas are expressed artistically". Andy Warhol, a postmodern artist and a graphic designer, whose art has been seen as "a celebration of kitsch" (Bloomberg Business, 2012) wanted to make art more mundane and multipliable. On the other hand, Misty Lambert (2006) wrote in her web dialogue *Warhol: Exploring Ostensible Kitsch* that "Andy Warhol's Campbell's Soup Cans is a primary example of commodity culture as high art".

Through his art Warhol redefined the roles of authorship and production in consumer culture as his silk press paintings were designed to be easily reproduced by anyone. This questions the old concepts for authenticity and uniqueness.

Jonathan Jones (2013) wrote on his article in The Guardian how the concept of kitsch has expired: "The word is German and has been used since the 20s, but one person's kitsch is another's lovely table lamp – so how can we talk about it without revealing layers of snobbery?" This supports also Bauman's view on the postmodern consumer culture how art viewers today enjoy all sorts of art forms and concentrating only on one form, or so called fine arts, in seen as snobbery and old fashioned. "Art is beyond taste. Leave your prejudices behind when you want to be uplifted." Jones proclaims. However, Douglas Holt (1998) claims that, (against how contemporary American ideology suggests tastes being individualized and disinterested), that tastes are never innocent of social consequences. Although, Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) theory of cultural capital suggested that taste of individual was determined based on their cultural capital as lower class had *taste of necessities*, whereas higher class's often choose experiences and self-expression over materials. These kind of consuming habits based on taste related to social class seem to have disappeared, although one significant consuming habit difference remains: higher class consumers wider variety of genres and styles than lower class consumers (Holt, 1998). Furthermore, Jean-François Lyotard (1984) makes distinction between taste and the sublime. Lyotard often wrote about the concept of *the sublime* (Lyotard, 1984; Drolet, 2008). According to Lyotard kitsch differs from the sublime art as sublime painting, unlike kitsch one, includes the oxymoron of enables us to see only by making it impossible to see, or in other words, it will please only by causing pain (Lyotard, 1984).

Society adapts and reforms difference and denies what cannot be reformed. In the foreword of the book *The Unbearable lightness of being* (1984, p.4) ponders the concept of kitsch and uses it to describe the willingness of denial and reflects his thoughts to those of Nietzsche's. "Kitsch is the absolute denial of shit, in both the literal and the figurative senses of the word; kitsch excludes everything from its purview which is essentially unacceptable in human existence". With this discussion they refer to existential hermeneutics: our understanding of

our values in life is based on the current language and knowledge but these values may turn as well into so called kitsch-narrations that are no longer compatible with our life.

3. THE SOCIAL ASPECT - Comforting community

"A self does not amount to much, but no self is an island; each exists in a fabric of relations that is now more complex and mobile than ever before."

-Jean-Francois Lyotard

Postmodern tribes: Communities of consumption

The Oxford dictionary defines a community as "A group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic in common". When it comes to consumption this "characteristic in common" may be affection to a certain brand, activity or for example idealistic way of consuming. The consumer culture today is individualistic, emphasizing individual experiences but at the same time collectivity seems to be highly important. Already in 1905 Georg Simmel saw the paradoxicality in consumer behavior, especially within subcultures. A good example is Simmel's theory of fashion: fashion is a paradoxical element since at the same time it is a way to separate oneself from the rest of the consumers but it is also a way to show belonging to a certain group which enhances collectivity within a specific group. This is the today's hipster effect where it is admirable to be unique and different from the mainstream consumers but the irony is easy to see when eventually everybody tries to differentiate themselves the same way and end up being the mainstream after all. Or, as Simmel put it, those who try to be unique and differ from the masses actually aren't since

they become the group of unique. Douglas Holt (1995) described this kind of behavior as "consuming as classification" that refers to the ways in which consumers consume objects to classify (or separate) themselves in relation to others around them. Mutual interests, idealistic views and consuming habits, for example, can create a feeling of community, which furthermore creates feeling of security and belonging in this rapidly changing world. As Bauman (2000) described community as a short cut to togetherness where identity is not only about who *you* are but also who *we* are. Identity of oneself can be extended to a certain activity, community or even a brand. These motivations and behaviors of a certain subculture are the essential part of consumer culture studies.

Brand communities, just like the definition of a community, are built around a mutual characteristic in common, here a certain brand, and can be a significant factor making consumers feel togetherness through a community (McAlexander et al., 2002). Supporting the same brand or product, like for example Harley Davidson motorcycles, the participants of the community can instantly feel sharing values and lifestyles (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). However, liquidity and virtual developments have affected also the brand communities and their nature. Virtual participation in events or lifestyles emphasizing liquid possessions such as access-based consumption might make the community less significant or even rather intimidating instead of supporting: for example Bardhi & Eckhardt (2012) discovered that brand community around shared Zipcars users was lacking symbolic meanings and identification but instead created a feeling of deterrence as consumers co-created the service outcomes together by, for example, keeping the shared car clean.

Furthermore, "despite the theoretical usefulness and descriptive power of brand community, recent research has found that many consumption communities do not locate their socialization around singular brands" (Goulding et al 2013, p. 815). Consumers may feel connection and similarity with each other and they may share experiences and social action that can be carried out through several brands, products and services. These actions and experiences are related to the activity in question and thus form *consumer tribes* instead of specific brand communities (Cova and Cova, 2002). Maffesoli (1995) describes the concept of tribes as a certain ambience and a state of mind, which is expressed through lifestyles. Also consumer culture theory has concentrated on communities built around subcultures like

extreme sports, underground music or other often "unconventional" themes, often based on non-commercial activity creating a tribe rather than brand community. For example Goulding and her colleagues (2013) studied clubbing tribe as a community of practice and found that these tribes are often ephemeral and non-commercial by nature which means they are more difficult to manage (by marketers). They identified engagement, imagination and alignment as key learning processes that are fundamental to the foundation of a tribe and, moreover, are connected to consumers' consumption done based on their identity building and shared identities. The identity building happens through communities and becomes a shared identity (Jans et al. 2011). Furthermore, non-commercialism can be taken even further like in Kozinets's (2002) study of Burning man festival where the communities or tribes could be seen as communities of *un*consumption or antimarket tribes.

Urban art - graffiti subculture

Street art and graffiti culture is an interesting subculture, as its motivations, behavior and symbolic meanings can be considered very strong (Helin, 2014). "It is a culture of unwritten rules, stories and meanings passed from one artist to another", as was explained by graffiti artists at Kallio Block Party. Academic literature that has concentrated on graffiti often concentrates on explaining the rebellious nature behind illegal graffiti that has lead to the bad or questionable reputation of graffiti art. Especially in the previous decades graffiti was seen almost exceptionally as vandalism. Although some pieces may have been done by very talented individuals, it didn't change the fact that they were done on illegal surfaces and were, thus, a crime (for example Halsey & Young, 2002*)*. This history affects graffiti culture also today, even when it's legal art in question.

For example Kurt Iveson (2009) explains the strong symbolic reputation of graffiti: basically it can be said that illegal graffiti equals bad times. A big part of the harm done by illegal graffiti is symbolic. First presented by Wilson and Kelling in 1982 this phenomenon is demonstrated as so called broken window theory: Broken window isn't a major crime itself but the sight of an unrepaired broken window sends a signal that no one cares which can be interpreted as ignorance and lack of interest from the authorities, which on its behalf means that breaking

more windows is acceptable as well. Thus, the broken window may represent a variety of small infractions such as begging, public drinking, fighting etc. but if they are ignored by the government, they may lead to bigger crimes and an overall feeling of unstable economic situation.

However, today as legal graffiti art gains its recognition, the symbolic nature of graffiti changes as well (Kramer, 2010). The broken window theory loses its meaning but some remains of the unknown or mysterious culture related to graffiti still seems to appear. Illegal or legal, painting graffiti has a strong social aspect and it can be often seen as a group activity. It isn't only about artists doing creative work together but it is as well characteristic to the subculture that people who participate in graffiti genre start creating their own pieces step by step, by learning from the others (Valle & Weiss, 2010). This way the inside knowledge, language and habits are passed on from artist to another.

Ronald Kramer (2010) who has studied especially legal graffiti culture, brings up other interesting themes within this changing era: increasing legality of graffiti art means there is new ideology behind it and thus new set of values that enable graffiti to raise its status in accepted art form. However this new ideology among audiences also seems to affect the culture and its participants. Since new legal places appear and graffiti art is even appreciated till the point of it becoming a paid job, it may be an interesting discussion to follow in the future how money affects art form that is previously seen as non-commercial and even rebellious as can be. For example the question of authenticity of legal graffiti art resembles the one of Warhol's repeatable art.

Based on the literature and online discussions related to graffiti there doesn't seem to be any two clear and opposing opinions about whether legal or commercial graffiti is inauthentic but neither one that has strict ethical values against crime and illegal graffiti. No one saw things too black and white. Moreover, the theme of legal graffiti is still so fresh that almost all today's graffiti artists that are doing legal art have started their "hobby" as a teenager when no legal options for graffiti existed. Thus, all "professional" graffiti artists that have many years' experience and are now in their late 30's or early 40's gained their skills while doing illegal paintings (Snyder 2009).

Whose space is it anyway?

Graffiti, illegal or legal, is usually done on public space where it can be seen by anyone. Graffiti can be seen by public and is a visual discussion forum where anyone can post their opinion, especially illegal graffiti tends to bring up issues that seem to be wrong in the society (Valle & Weiss, 2010). "Deploying art in unexpected or forbidden places to stimulate reflection and social action, street artists and active dwellers create an aesthetic commons that invites belonging and participation" (Visconti et al. 2010, p.16). Public place is always also some sort of a marketplace and is strongly connected to consumer culture as it is a place for the social interaction that is defined by the culture in question, social resources and symbolic meanings of the lifestyles (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Visconti et al. (2010) use the word "urban places" to describe appropriated sites where social interactions, feeling of togetherness or belonging to somewhere and shared identities occur. These places are a central part of graffiti culture.

As typical to today's consumer culture in general too, roles of production and consumption are blending in together (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995), which is happening to production and consumption of a public good, too. On one hand graffiti artists consume public space by using it as (free) painting place but on the other hand they work as producers as the art done on public space makes it a free art experience to the audience. This two-way action is interesting as, like Miller (2002, p. 154) argues, it "defies a system that puts a price tag on everything". Whether the graffiti is enjoyable art or muddle that ruins the view is another discussion that defines the acceptance of who can exploit public space. Previously the discussion was easier to disregard as the graffiti pieces were done illegally and thus a crime so the easy answer to graffiti was 'no'. However, legality allows for the graffiti to move towards art (instead of smudges) since legality makes it possible to spend more time on it, instead of making a quick tag while watching for the police to show up (Gomez, 1993). This raises again the question of who should be able to exploit public space and do their art there and who gets to deny it. For example mural paintings on apartment building walls are popular in

cities that embrace street art culture, such as Berlin, but in Finland the questions related to collectively owned or public goods seems to be dealt with high bureaucracy. Getting permissions to paint on collectively owned building wall that is seen by everyone seems close to impossible.

4. DATA - The spokesmen of the era

The research was conducted as a video ethnographic research and is based on documented interviews and observations done on graffiti gatherings and painting events. The data is collected in years 2014-2015. The videos consist of interview material of several hours by four different graffiti artists, some other commentators and general documentation and observation of the graffiti culture and the organized painting gatherings. The interviewees were selected as they are all active participants of the graffiti culture in greater Helsinki area and also act as producers of the culture activity.

What happened and where?

The interviews were held in places of their selection and the formality was kept to minimum without any constructed interview settings. There were no strict questions presented to the artists but rather letting them tell about their graffiti experiences by their own words. As examples of the graffiti gatherings I filmed more or less organized events where painters gathered up to paint together.

Kallio Block Party: Graffiti Wall

Kallio Block Party is urban street fest that celebrates urban culture, arts and street food. The organizers requested certain graffiti artists to come and perform live painting as an act. The

event was targeted to all viewers despite the age or background, and the actual graffiti wall where the painting took place was set up in the playground where children were playing and had activities aimed for them. The painting surface was stretched plastic that was wrapped around trees and was taken down after the event.

Bada Bing Graffiti Wall competition

A bar & nightclub Bada Bing organized a graffiti painting competition where they requested the best graffiti artists in greater Helsinki area. In front of the bar was an ongoing renovation work and the bar wanted to make use of the plain gray construction site walls in front of its entrance. The permission from the city was applied.

Art triangle hosted by the City of Helsinki

For the couple of weeks during the summer the City of Helsinki sets up so called "Art triangle" in front of Kiasma. The Art triangle consists of three walls put together forming a triangle shaped room. The walls are free to paint on with no further rules on restrictions. Also, no space or turns are admitted from the organizer but instead anyone can go and paint on the walls, or on the previous piece. The spot was a popular place for the graffiti artists and fans to come and spend time in the summer.

Graffiti Workshop at Education fare

Education fare for kindergarten teachers had a graffiti workshop as a part of the schedule. The fare was organized at Finlandia house and two graffiti artists were asked to host the event and tell about graffiti as an art form. The idea was to teach new art techniques for the teacher to teach for the kids as a play form.

A private person ordered a graffiti themed spray paint piece painted straight on their living room wall. This painting was created by several spray paint sablona and took about 10 hours to make.

The profiles

The profiles of the four graffiti artists differ from each others and each artist seems to have their own style and ways of doing graffiti art.

Hende

Hende has worked many years within graffiti field and does a lot of teaching and organized graffiti workshops for different student groups and work teams. He also studies culture production at University of Applied Sciences. He is very interested in the politics ruling the graffiti field and tries to act as a speaker for the legal graffiti. His style is more cartoon-like and the images often have some sort of message or statement about current discussion topics.

Jussi TwoSeven

Jussi has studied some courses in Aalto University of Arts but considers himself to be mostly self learned artist. Jussi is rather successful artist in the finish gallery art scene and has had many exhibitions. He has taken the graffiti/ street art towards

the conventional art form and does most of his street art inspired work on canvas nowadays.

Peetu

 Peetu has his own company, Beamer Lifestyle that does graffiti based on customer orders. He does a lot of paintings on his free time as well. As a part of the company they have also designed graffiti styled printed t-shirts, beanies and other clothing. Peetu concentrates on written words in his pieces but may complete them with some illustrations as well.

Juha

Juha is also a graphic designer by profession and works in an advertising agency. He studies graphic design at Aalto University School of Arts. He does graffiti as a hobby and has done it over a decade. The interest in graffiti also lead to his studies to be a graphic designer. He is also interested in hiphop and breakdance cultures which are strongly related to the graffiti culture. Many of his friends are involved with all of these cultures at the same time as well.

5. THE CATCH

The output

Answering the research question of "motives and meanings of self-actualization when creating temporary art" has several levels and aspects. First of all, the self-actualization process (which was proven to be an important identity building process) is important to be understood from two perspectives: the individual one where the artists carry out their personal creativity and the collective one where the self-actualization is done as part of collective. Secondly, it was found that the discovered motives and meanings were strongly attached to living the culture in general in addition to the creation of this temporary art itself. Three main findings was discovered:

1. It's about the journey not the destination – the inner passion

Graffiti is a very temporary art form. Unexpectedly, none of the artists seemed to mind that the pieces that took hours of work might disappear the next day. "It is just the nature of this thing", explains Peetu "and everybody knows this even when they start painting". Also Hende said, "it doesn't matter if the piece gets painted over, that's the nature of graffiti". As the first major finding, I discovered that enjoying the painting activity and "simply getting to do this" is all the satisfaction they need and leaving behind something physical appeared to be secondary. Hende concluded:

"Sounds a bit boring but my own motivations are the most important, as I want to get the good feeling and sort of feeling of succeeding. And because I like it, that's the most important reason (for doing this)."

Most of the artists had troubles pointing out what the fascinating thing about graffiti art is and what actually are the motives for doing it over and over again. However, all agreed that the inspiration and interest towards graffiti art and culture started when they were young. Also, spray cans and as artistic mean were mentioned to be inspiring. Even though as the pieces are often the size of a wall and thus might take several hours to make, it still seems to be worth of doing it - no matter if anything permanent comes out of it. And even further, the mutual dream of all interviewees was to get to make even bigger pieces on a huge wall. As in many artistic activities, when painting graffiti piece the concept of time changes. For example Hende explained that it's just cool to get into this so-called flow state and do your own thing by yourself. Then you kind of stop noticing what happens around you - even though there would actually be many painters doing a bigger combined piece. All of the artists described how flow state is something they aim for but it's not a specifically happy feeling. "When in flow state, you don't really think about anything, it's kind of very liberating and sort of primitive feeling", Peetu explains. Furthermore, it's not always just enjoyable but rather putting up with the circumstances in order to get to paint. Peetu continues about the painting experience in Miami Art Basel:

"It was actually a really heavy case. It was hot and we were thirsty but then on the other hand it was nice go through some photos a year back when we were painting at Kirkkonummi (Finland) and it was a bit different case with the rain and cold weather…" – "We just went there (to Miami) and performed the whole trip doing the same big piece, the three of us…. Those were long days."

Unlike previous literature has suggested (for example Gomez, 1993) the primary motivation for doing graffiti does not seem to be fame & recognition although painter's own name tag done with graffiti letterforms is a common theme for pieces. Furthermore, the interviewed artists claimed that it is not a motivation at all, but instead they rather do the art for themselves. For example Hende describes his pieces:

"It's actually pretty rare that I'd do (a piece of) my own name. Although sometimes I put the "Hende" there but it's.. well.. I'm not that interested in the letterforms, some people like it, but I think it's a bit boring to do the

same letters every time" -- "I do always put the small tag in the pieces but that's the signature and it's part of graffiti."

Although it seems rather impossible scenario that the artists wouldn't even unconsciously think about the recognition brought along the art piece, they explain it further: not all art or creative content celebrate the artist; some pieces that require artistic skills and inspiration don't even show the name of the artist and this is the case in, for example, fashion photographs of illustrations in an advertisement. Also, none of the interviewed artists admitted using hardly any preparations beforehand or making sketches of the piece when doing a freestyle graffiti piece. Sometimes if it's an organized event where a third party will offer the paint, then the colors must be decided beforehand but that's pretty much all the planning they make like Peetu explained. "You just kind of go there and start making what you feel like doing at the moment." In general, the key is to just go to the wall and get the feeling you are doing it for yourself. None of the artists was too excited about paid painting jobs that would have a strict guidelines of what the piece should present. Furthermore, getting too famous and thus commercial has made graffiti artists paint over and erase their work in Berlin that ended up being part of famous street art tours and eventually rising the apartment building prices within the area

(http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/dec/19/why-we-painted-over-berlin-graffiti-kreuzberg-murals.).

In the long run, it's also about accepting the state of legal graffiti in Finland. The artist agree that it would be cool to make huge, permanent murals on the sides of buildings but at this point the temporary walls are pretty much the only possibility in Finland (without few exceptions). In most cases, pictures are taken when the piece is done but that is the only memory of it. As with any subject that comes with deep passion and sort of perceived mission, also doing graffiti art seems to apply a certain type of *accepted melancholy* that is seen as part of the culture. It seems to be related to the whole concept of doing temporary legal graffiti; painting on disposable surfaces, uncertainty of the future, undefined concepts of contemporary graffiti art and the personal struggles of doing their own thing. For example according to Peetu:

"Ply wood wall is what it is… It would be a lot cooler if it (painting place) was part of concrete wall or something so that the end result, including the surroundings, would look better also in photos. And the plywood describes pretty well this atmosphere of temporariness."--"Plywood isn't the best material since the paint may come off easily if it's a bad weather for example. It' s also boring as it's always the standard height, it would be cool to make higher pieces sometimes since now the proportions have to be the same every time…"

The uncertainty related to graffiti's state in the future came up in several conversations. The general atmosphere seems to be that the state of legal graffiti in Finland will change but no one knows to which direction. For example Jussi was taking about his painting career both as a gallery artist and street artist:

"It seems like it's supposed to bring some kind of additional value when they use a title 'graffiti artist' in the media…I don't know if it's good for my career, it might be more someway just trendy now but may be totally out of fashion in couple of years…"

And as Jussi explained, graffiti is meant to be temporary and you can take photographs of the pieces but at the same time it's kind of a bummer since the original piece is always better than what can be seen in the picture. The biggest question or worry, however, seems to be the uncertain future of legal graffiti, which seems to affect the nature of doing graffiti. The permanent painting places with certain amount of walls are rare but increasing. Especially there the pieces get painted over constantly since the amount of walls is limited with no place for new pieces. The nature of the legal graffiti today is that it is very temporary but it's also part of the culture that nice pieces are respected. The general rule is that you can paint over only a nice piece that is being covered so it becomes sort of a battle. However plain vandalism and ruining the piece seems to be an issue within the culture but again that's one on the downsides that are part of the graffiti nature. Moreover, as the legal walls are so rare, even the general unspoken rules of only painting better one on the top of previous don't always apply since the painting places would run out fast.

2. The medium is the message – the communication

As Marshall McLuhan (1964) famously stated, the form of a medium embeds itself in the message, creating a symbiotic relationship between the message and the medium. Thus, the medium influences how the message is perceived. It is important for the interviewed graffiti artists that the medium is a public wall and precisely graffiti art on it. Furthermore, it even seems to be secondary what the piece actually represents as the art being there is a strong message itself: graffiti is becoming an acceptable, legal art form. According to interviewees the style doesn't even matter, or if it's "real graffiti" out there. Defining graffiti is difficult since there are as many opinions about it as painters. Some people may not consider for example commercial or paid pieces as graffiti or pieces done by someone outsider from the graffiti scene. However, it seems to be secondary to get some strict definitions and guidelines for what counts as authentic graffiti and who get to do it. The action of painting is the most important thing and the victory of getting any graffiti related art visible to public and being accepted art form.

And as always, the bigger the better. So, as the second finding can be stated that one piece of graffiti sends multiple messages to several recipients and the form of art, graffiti, and its location is a message itself. When discussed what is still missing or what has been the most exciting work of theirs, the artists unanimously answered that the most satisfying work has been big surfaces. Painting on a 2 x 5 meter plywood wall on a public space is a message of a small victory. It is about competing with enterprises and their huge billboards of gaining ad space and attention. According to the interviewees the satisfaction of getting graffiti on a public space next to an expensive billboard is enormous. So even legal graffiti culture still remains some of the rebellious nature from the past, but not as much against government but perhaps other affecting forces such as consumerism.

Also Juha brought up the discussion of who owns the public space and gets to state their messages there (advertisers vs. painters). The square meters among vivid places are expensive so getting "ad space" for graffiti art can be seen as branding the subculture. Also the medium

is the message that way that it is a small winning that all the efforts done by graffiti artists fighting for the rights to do legal, accepted graffiti have paid off, at least a little and step by step. The plywood wall as a medium says that it' s here and it's legal (at least for now). Also every artist that was interviewed, mentioned the size of the "canvas" being one of the main things that is appealing when doing graffiti (compared to for example drawing on a paper). This was due both the joy of painting big strikes and also as the end result was big and would, in the best case, gain the same amount of attention as a billboard.

Another interesting discussion that came up was the audience: the medium is the message and a message has to have an audience that receives it. It's graffiti and its existence is a message and there can be seen two different audiences. As graffiti is often done in public space, it could be assumed that the artists want to address it to anyone who walks by. Instead, it came up that most of the artists claimed that they don't really think about who sees it, and that the art is done just out of pure joy of doing it, or in other words, for themselves. Especially for example Psyke (one of the painters I met at a painting place) claimed that "normal people" usually don't even understand the details related to the graffiti culture, nor are they able to read the typography of the piece and thus the art may not be as appealing to them as to other artists who are deeper in the graffiti culture. So according to Psyke it could be said that the main message of the painting is aimed to other artists who so become the primary audience. Also Juha explained:

"I guess in many cases it's done for themselves (who make i)t and for the community. Maybe partly because (the piece/typography) isn't always that easy to read and the people that are not involved with the graffiti culture may not get all the details that are related to it. But it's often done in public space. It makes you to think about the public space and who is it aimed for and who gets to put their messages in public space… which leads us to the discussion why advertising is ok but other kinds of messages aren't…It would be nice if public space was brought back to this kind of art activities… which is also happening now, so this is the right direction."

However, it seems to be important for the graffiti artists to make the reputation of graffiti better in the eyes of "normal people", too. For example Jussi was talking about his art:

"I don't really think about it (the audience). I just do it for myself. Maybe I rather think about the place, like what kind of piece fits to each place but I don't really think about who sees it… My pieces are easily understandable; anyone gets them so they can work for vast audiences." – "..if I have to make money it's nice that art collectors appreciate my art. But for example the samurai paintings I did were liked by both art collectors and kinds, that's the ideal setting."

For the same reason, also Hende likes to make more illustrations instead of plain tags since they are understandable for the mainstream audiences. The pieces represented everything from visually imposing tags made with graffiti themed typography to different cartoon-like illustrations, but mostly something that can be understood by anyone. Moreover, Hende believes that graffiti can bring joy to people. He explains:

"Well, sure, it's for the bypassers. If somebody sees it, that's nice, but it's not the main purpose. It's more about the feeling of exploring and finding a piece somewhere unexpected, when you are just walking by… That's in way a small purpose of this for me."

Also Jussi emphasized the public aspect of graffiti and the enriching nature:

"It would be nice if I could just do art that is seen by as many people as possible, since quite small percentage of people go to galleries"--"If art would be seen on the streets, it could bring people closer to art and also encourage people also going to galleries…So I think it could be a thing that enriches the culture."

However one thing combined all the artists and pieces as the artists carry on dialogues within their *figured world* (Valle & Weiss, 2010). As common to graffiti culture in general too these dialogues are conducted as inner conversations with themselves but also as constant interpretations of the world around them. Also it could be said that the deeper "message" or theme of one piece is aimed mostly at other artists but the general message of graffiti existing

at all and being an art form is aimed generally to wider masses. The themes what the pieces represent vary a lot depending on the artist and even the case.

3. One for all, all for one – the social aspect

Belonging to a subculture and sharing the same values and interests brings together artists from different backgrounds and also hanging out with other painters is seen as an important activity, not only the painting itself. As the third finding I discovered that motives for making temporary graffiti art were not only in the satisfaction received from the activity of spraying the paint but also in the perceived sense of a community around the painters. The graffiti painting gatherings were social events where the artists took turns and at some days couple of them were painting and the rest of the group were just hanging out and the other way around. It can be seen as a performance where the artists take turns "on the stage" and the others are the audience and enjoy themselves and chat with each other. The organizing of the painting gatherings and the piece itself is usually handled in a very relaxed way.

The artists felt solidarity and belonging when having a mutual task of promoting the legal graffiti in Finland. The artists explained how it's a continuous project of fighting for this thing. Everybody does a lot of work for getting a better position for legal graffiti but as Hende stated, nobody knows how things are going to be like in five years. The general atmosphere is that we are now living a sort of "trial period" of legal walls and the position of the government may as well turn back to zero-tolerance as it may develop further to support legal graffiti art. Documenting the painting events seemed to be important for the artists as "it increases the not-so-big stash of evidence of this era", as Hende explained. Furthermore he continued that it would be nice to get copies of these documentations as they may become rare if the state of legal graffiti only becomes a phase in graffiti history. Legal graffiti should and would make graffiti seen as an actual art form and important part of pop culture instead of being something shady that youth criminals do when they feel like protesting. For example posting photos to Instagram and other channels is not only a way to document the piece that will most likely disappear but also a way to spread the word about nice graffiti. Individual promotion and "gaining name" as artist wasn't really the priority in any discussion but rather

the performance of the group and the whole scene were promoted. Despite the uncertainty, the artists mutually agreed that getting painting permissions and making graffiti art more visible to wider audiences in the urban scene is a self-forcing positive cycle from which everyone in the subculture benefits. And it's something to fight for. Juha described the nature of legal graffiti:

"Now people can do it (graffiti), not for the adrenaline and search for fame, but for aesthetics and as a medium. I think this is a state that is good for everyone.."-- "Though, it's interesting to see where this all is going to be in five or ten years." – "Legal graffiti hobby organizing and such is a good thing and all parties advantage from that. There shouldn't be too strict attitude and rules about what is considered as graffiti, it would be better that everybody could try graffiti on the legal walls."

Even though, according to the interviewees, there are some most radical artists who consider there to be strict unwritten rules about who gets to do graffiti and what counts as graffiti, the general atmosphere seems to be that every artist applies the rules for themselves how they seem fit and do their own thing. As long as you enjoy doing what you do and consider yourself as a graffiti artist (or street artists) and being part of the subculture, you may be. Every artist is an individual with own (hopefully) recognizable style but together they form a group with their own culture. Every graffiti artist seems to do their own thing without really caring what others may think or consider to be "genuine graffiti art". It doesn't matter if it's too commercial, if it has just letter types or pictures, if it's made by "genuine" graffiti artists or by first timers in a workshop. Doing graffiti is often a group activity and the group consists of painters and "hangers" who watch. Thus it is also an act of socializing. Juha explained:

"It is fun and participating activity to go sketching together and stuff... The whole (graffiti) culture is fun because of it's participating nature." – "And also the "do it yourself" attitude what is related to the culture and fashion, we modified our own denim jackets and the shoe laces had to be big and so on…" – "So it's the self-made and hand craft doing attitude that is fascinating about the culture."

However, the individual performance is also important and even though often the pieces done by individuals are blend in together, everyone concentrates on their own piece and does it with their own style. Also everyone has his or her own recognizable style and typography (at least recognizable by other artists) that enforces their performance as an individual and thus their artistic identity. Within a group, even when painting together, everybody "sinks into their own flow state and ignores what the others do", as Peetu explained." You just trust that in the end the pieces go well together". However, doing graffiti is also strongly an artistic self-actualization process and individual performance and for example Hende and Jussi admitted that despite the nice subculture and feeling of community they prefer to do the actual painting alone. They both spend several hours on one piece and need the feeling of concentration with no distractions. This is also related to the flow state they described. Plus for example, according to Hende, everybody else would get bored if they went painting together and he would polish the piece for ages.

The local subculture groups were emphasized within the big graffiti culture. The world becomes all the time more and more global as the physical and mental borders decrease. It is easy to get in touch with graffiti artists all over the world and feel connected but at the same time, one's own origins were highlighted. Our language, subculture and identity tie us strongly to certain regional circumstances. According to Eronen and Pieniniemi (2013) it could be said that in the postmodern information era global and local are in constant interaction between each other: in the last decades a term 'glocal' has been used to describe the culture combining global and local. Also graffiti culture is strongly a matter of locality and globalism. One's own background and neighborhood is often emphasized (even like printed t-shirts stating a part of town) and ties certain people together but at the same time social media and the easiness of travelling has made graffiti painting a global hobby that brings together people from very different places. Painting gatherings are common and as Peetu explained, painting is the only mutual thing you need in order to feel belonging:

"The painting group changes a lot. It can be different every time but it's really easy to just say to anyone you've just met that lets go paint… It's a strong bonding thing, there is really no need for anything else to have in common."

After all, Kozinets' (2002, p.36) description of the nature of Burning man gathering could as well be done about the graffiti: "It is not a grand Utopia, but a more personally enriching youtopia—a good place for me to be myself, and you to be yourself, together."

…when it comes to consumers..

> "Being in a shopping mall feels like being elsewhere"
> - Zygmunt Bauman

"It is easier for consumers to live in self-authenticating simulations when they are tightly bounded in time and in space. The speed of hypercommunity, the urgency of performativity, and the inversion of the festival all overlap to enthrone the disorderly, chaotic, anarchic, creative, risk-taking, and innovative forces of human nature, as against its orderly, planned, preprogrammed, boring, and imitative aspects. For practical reasons, communities of this sort can only be temporary. Yet the illumination of taken-for-granted market logics, the flashes of inspiration, and the transformation of individuals and groups may be longer lasting." (Kozinets, 2002, p.36)

Just as the artists experienced so called flow state where you cease to notice things around you and lose the sense of time, also consumers seem to seek that kind of small escape from the reality from time to time. Furthermore, organizations should aim for flow state among their employees, at least according to management scholar Csikszentmihalyi (1997). He describes how "one obvious way to enhance creativity is to bring as much as possible of the flow experience into the various domains" (p.10). According to this statement, it could be seen that flow state is something to aim for as it increases the productivity and helps to ignore outside world and thus reduce distractions.

The traditional view on timeflow has been changed also through virtual existence. Interaction and many other activities have moved online where people can be present when they want to and on the other hand lose the track of time while concentrating on virtual activities like online gaming (Boje, 2005). Flow state is not only achievable via artistic means but can be received by any interesting and motivating activity. The desire to "getting elsewhere" or lose sense of time in a flow state seems to be present also in other consumer activities; like Niklas Woermann and Joonas Rokka (2015, p.8) defined, "timeflow is a quality *for* the practitioner but *of* a (consumption) practice" and the flow feeling can be obtained through motivating or meaningful events. What is the admirable thing about forgetting time and place then? Bauman (2000) claimed that places like shopping malls have their own time flow that is different from the "real reality" outside which makes them perfect places for people to go spend time and money. He described shopping malls as temples of consumption where people can feel the perfect balance of security and freedom. People forget the world outside. However, the concept of time and examination of it is difficult. To study consumers' temporal experiences in consumption practices, Woermann and Rokka (2015) formed a framework that isn't particularistic or subjectivist, since it considers temporal experience to be an effect of performing consumption practices. In other words there is no time outside the shopping mall or one that differs from the time flow while shopping around. Furthermore, "The timeflow of a practice is defined as its ability to evoke an experienced temporality that cannot be reduced to either subjective 'inner' time or cosmic 'outer' time" and moreover, "distinguishing between universal time and timeflow does not create contradictions with existing research into the timing of consumption, or, when and how often consumers consume" (Woermann & Rokka, 2015, p.23).

Postmodern consumer culture has increased the meaning of experiences instead of hoarding more and more material in hope of a more satisfying life (Nicolao et al. 2009; Holt, 1998; Bardhi, 2012). Furthermore, the phenomenon can be compared to Bourdieu's theory (1984) of materialism: according to him, lower class citizens had the taste of "necessities" and consumed more material things since their everyday life consisted of buying the necessities they needed. In contrary, higher class who had all material things they needed, rather consumed immaterial things that enabled self-expression. This way could be interpreted that as consumer society gets wealthier, they no longer find the satisfaction in material things but

search for meanings and self-expression instead. According to Alan Durning (1993, p.20) "many in the consumer society have a sense that their world of plenty is somehow hollow that, hoodwinked by a consumerist culture, they have been fruitlessly attempting to satisfy with material things what are essentially social, psychological, and spiritual needs."

People seem to look for meanings that can't be solved by just money. Richard Easterlin (2001) proved the non-existing correlation between increasing income and happiness - as the income grows the aspirations grow along with it, which makes it impossible to ever obtain the material desires. He writes "Income growth does not, however, cause well-being to rise, either for higher or lower income persons, because it generates equivalent growth in material aspirations, and the negative effect of the latter on subjective well-being undercuts the positive effect of the former" (Easterlin, 2001 p.481). People as consumers or members of a subculture live for their mission and get satisfaction, not only from material, but of expressing themselves - taken to more abstract level, following Nietzche's thought of *Übermensch* (overhuman, superman) that has a mission in life with own values and lives to fulfill that mission. Like doing graffiti is repeating the same thing over and over again, fighting for legal graffiti becomes the main activity. Related to the discovered mentality of subculture life and painting seen as a journey, not a destination, consumers in general seem to follow the same pattern when searching for satisfying life. People are happier when they have a mission and perform meaningful activities. "Find a happy person, and you will find a project", stated psychology professor Sonja Lyubomirsky on CNN interview (2015). In graffiti art, it's not about whether the final painting will be up for hours or years, it's the painting and living the painting culture that gives meaning to the act. Sometimes waiting and working for something meaningful can bring more happiness than the actual end result. It has been proved that the most significant peak in happiness comes from the exiting wait of the trip and simply from planning the vacation instead of actually being on the waited vacation (Nawijn et al. 2010).

The increasing feeling of emptiness, lack of consistency, ecstasy of communication and unanchored melancholy are the downside of postmodernism and fats development. However, maybe the melancholy experience isn't fully a bad thing. It has worked as an inspiring force for artist over decades and seems to be also a driving power to keep trying - whether it's self-actualization or some concrete goal (Wilson, 2008). Some sort of

unhappiness with the current state is also vital for the economy as whole and the overall development. The constant feeling of unease and hope of more happiness drives consumers to buy more, use more, search more experiences and express themselves more in order to possibly find meanings in these actions. However, the reason of doing so isn't anymore just about "keeping up with the Joneses" but rather finding meanings for the life. According to Bauman (2000) there are other ways of finding satisfaction, happiness and meaningful life than increased consumption that increases production. The countermovement for spending a lot in order to get satisfaction is finding satisfaction in experiences or liquid possessions.

So what?

The objective of this research was to create an understanding of consumers as participants of a community and subculture. Furthermore, the object was to get closer to the understanding of how consumers perceive their actions and express themselves in this liquid modern world. As Csikszentmihalyi (1997, p.1) points out "creativity cannot be understood by looking only at the people who appear to make it happen". Thus the aim of this study is not to seek for one truth of creativity but rather hearing artists'/ subculture participants' thoughts of their lives and actions. The true understanding of need for self-actualization and creativity as a phenomenon would require a lot deeper research. However, some interpretations and generalizations to wider consumer culture were made. In this case the graffiti subculture can be considered as consumer tribe. Christina Goulding et al. (2015, p.814) noted that "Tribal marketing challenges creative individuals who are prepared to abandon traditional demographic or psychographic means of segmenting and targeting markets to think outside of the box and get closer to the tribe. It is not about constructing messages and brand personalities and projecting them onto an audience of disparate individuals."

Some other limitations apply as well. As "truthful" image as I as a researcher and a producer try to give, it is good to keep in mind that subjective decisions still have been made. As Belk & Kozinets (2005, p.137) concluded, "there is a host of creative decisions that necessarily intervene between production and consumption of videographic research". I will have two roles in this research, one as a data collector and one as a film producer. Both of these phases

of conducting a video ethnographic research where the end product is a video documentary include several subjective decisions done by me. As the postmodern paradigm strongly suggests, the world is not seen as an outer space that is independent from the actors within it (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Thus, this is a qualitative research that tries not to find universal truths about consumers but rather understand how the four interviewed artists comprehend the world around them and more narrowly, the community they are part of. This is an interpretative research and thus the interviews had no strict structures or direct questions but rather I tried to document the events as they were and let the interviewees tell about their art with their own words. Although the aim is to produce unbiased data and findings, (as the word interpretative suggests), the findings are subjectively my interpretations of the data and rather a discussion of the data than objective truths. However, in the end I will try to find confluences to the broader consumer culture in general. Belk & Kozinets (2005, p.137) noted that "because the viewer of video is often less critical than the reader of written reports, there is a special obligation for video researchers to try to tell a coherent story or stories without taking undue liberties with the visual and auditory data." However, without underrating the accuracy of video material, in order to familiarize myself with the theme of graffiti art in Finland I have, in addition to the video footage, collected supportive newspaper articles, researches and online discussions about graffiti art in Finland.

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