

MALIN FRANSBERG

Helsinki Graffiti Subculture

Meanings of Control and Gender
in the Aftermath of Zero Tolerance

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ACADEMIC DISSERTATION

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Omistettu niille, jotka elivät nollatoleranssissa.

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Fifteen years ago, I could not have believed that I was about to start an academic career. For it was a cultural shock to attend the university as a young student in 2006. People there spoke in a different way, they were using strange words and manners that I was truly unfamiliar with. I often felt like an outsider because I did not know how to use academic jargon and those peculiar concepts that an intellectual language is so often demanded. My way of knowing and articulating how things go, how power, and social justice works, was rather learned on the streets among friends, who were in constant trouble with the long arm of the law. Yet, some fortunate befalls made me feel more comfortable in the academic world. In 2008, I was accepted for an exchange program at the Department of Criminology in Stockholm University and here my theoretical interest in critical criminology sparked. When I later discovered that I could combine this academic interest with urban ethnography on a methods course taught by Lena Näre and Elina Paju at the University of Helsinki, I knew what to write about. In 2011, I presented my idea at the graduate seminars for sociology students with Professor Harriet Strandell, who soon advised me to approach Professor Päivi Honkatukia to ask her willingness to supervise my study on young males' train writing subculture in Helsinki. She agreed, and once I graduated, I was encouraged by Päivi to continue. With her help, I applied for the Doctoral Programme in Social Sciences at the Tampere University.

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spatiality, and Keith Hayward for his profound knowledge of cultural criminology. I also want to thank Professor Turo-Kimmo Lehtonen for agreeing to take the role of custos.

Along the way, I have had the privilege of receiving commentaries on my work in several academic communities. In an early stage of my PhD studies, I was invited by Päivi to join a national network of critical criminologists. Here, I met some of the criminological experts, such as Heini Kainulainen, Anne Alvesalo-Kuusi, Timo Korander and Helena Huhta. I want to express my deepest gratitude for this group of critical criminologists who was a tremendous inspiration at the beginning of my research project.

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My family has supported me in many ways. I want to thank my mother Aila Markus, my father Klas Fransberg, and my two younger siblings. Mom, for always educating me and strengthening the rational side of me. Dad, for having the critical thought and the inspiration to always question authority. The small discussions we had in my tweens on how society works have undoubtedly influenced me to write this piece. Axel, for always giving a helping hand, but most of all because of showing what calmness in life is. And Asta, thank you for teaching me about what sensitiveness is. Thank you all for supporting me and letting me grow up in a family like ours and in a house called Toivo.

Over the years there are many friends that have inspired me in my work. Many of you have been along since we started to explore the mystiques of urban life and some of you have regrettably passed away. I cannot mention you all, so I choose to express my gratitude for letting me be part of the best street team one can ever imagine. You know who you are. Thank you for all the joy and sorrow we shared. It is easy to be myself when spending time with you. For providing me a break in the mundane and for the pleasurable disobedience in endless nights, thank you Ellu and Fanni. For intimate compassion and believing in gender diversity, I want to thank Saara and Niina and our Femakko-klubi. You have proved that intellectual talk is not exclusive and that anyone can read Judith Butler.

There is a particular place that has kept me alive throughout the demanding penning years, and that I liked to mention here. It literally kept me and my nearest fed, but also my mind in peace, and that is my colony garden in Itä-Pakila. The digging in the mud makes me smile and keeps me spending hours watching the greenery growing. This place, a rather clayey spot with plenty of authoritative female figures around, has taught me that dirty hands are equal to tired, yet incredibly strong bodies. Thank you, Peppi for being there.

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In Helsinki, March 2021.

ABSTRACT

This thesis by publication is an urban ethnographic study on the Helsinki graffiti subculture, consisting of this summary, and four peer-reviewed journal articles (Publications I – IV). The thesis asks what the meanings of control and gender in the Helsinki based graffiti subculture are. Graffiti is approached as a youth subculture that has a cultural tradition associated with the North American graffiti subculture in the 1970s, and which in the 1980s formed into a transnational youth subculture through a prolific spread of popular graffiti books and video documentary. The first graffiti pieces also appeared in the city of Helsinki in mid-1980s, and quickly developed to a popular youth subculture.

The study explores meanings of control and gender in graffiti writing throughout the different societal reaction periods towards this activity. Amongst several Nordic cities, Helsinki exercised zero tolerance against graffiti in 1998 – 2008 with the “Stop töhryille” -project. During zero tolerance legal graffiti was prohibited, and graffiti as an art form was censured in several ways. An increased crime prevention on graffiti, and a municipal investment in private security company marginalized graffiti writers’ rights to city space. From 2009 onwards Helsinki became more liberal towards graffiti and street art, fostering the integration of these art forms in a public urban culture through legal art projects, public exhibitions, and by offering legal walls for graffiti writers and street artists. In the aftermath of zero tolerance, street art has become a recognized art form on the streets of Helsinki. While the two artforms are distinguished different, they share common features in the urban space. Moreover, graffiti is often ‘masculinized’ and street art ‘femininized’, both in the public and subcultural discourses, which subsequently affects the two artforms’ meaning and subcultural recognition.

This thesis is contextualized with a growing interdisciplinary field known as graffiti and street art research (GSAR), whilst cultural criminology provides a theoretical perspective for this research, with a strong emphasis on gendered experiences of control. It seeks to incorporate feminist philosophy in the work of cultural criminology’s. The research is based in the author’s long-term ethnographic edgework in the Helsinki graffiti subculture. The methodological approach thus includes active participatory observation in the subculture and the research data

consists of the author's field diary conducted in 2011 – 2019 and 26 recorded interviews with fifteen women and with eleven men aged 18 – 43 the years 2014 and 2019. Additional ethnographic material consists of thousands of photographs taken from the field, 24 court decisions on graffiti cases at Helsinki Court of Appeal in 2000 – 2018, a collection of national mass media news on graffiti, anti-graffiti material, police reports on graffiti vandalism, Finnish graffiti magazines and video documentaries, social media updates related to graffiti, as well the author's own memorial notes on graffiti subculture.

The analysis presents Helsinki graffiti subculture as a male-dominated subculture and recognizes the dominating image of graffiti as a hetero-masculine endeavor, whilst marginalizing other gender performativities in subcultural storytelling, and in the forms of subcultural archiving. Moreover, the analysis confirms that only males are held responsible for graffiti vandalism at presented court cases, and that most court cases are performed within the period of zero tolerance, while they diminish the post-zero tolerance period. The period of zero tolerance is dominating the subcultural narrative of Helsinki graffiti. The analysis shows how zero tolerance policy and guard surveillance have subsequently toughening the graffiti writing milieu, resulting into expressions of rage and integrating homophobic discourses within the subculture. However, the study recognizes a significant increase in active female participants, especially in the post-zero tolerance era, and identifies street art as a significant feature of a contemporary feminist movement in Helsinki graffiti. The study moreover problematizes graffiti as a disembodied practice, as the graffiti writing body is chiefly hiding from a mundane audience and crime control when painting illegally, and thus complicates the identification of the subcultures diverse gender performances. Subsequently, it recognizes changing dynamics of control and gender performances in graffiti subculture and offers a shared analytic framework for both cultural criminology and feminist philosophy.

TIIVISTELMÄ

Tämä väitöskirja on kaupunkietnografinen tutkimus Helsingin graffitialakulttuurista, ja se koostuu tästä yhteenvedosta, sekä neljästä vertaisarvioituista artikkeleista (Publications I – IV). Tutkimuksessa kysytään mitkä ovat kontrollin ja sukupuolen merkitykset Helsingin graffiti alakulttuurissa. Graffiteja lähestytään nuorisoalakulttuurin näkökulmasta, jonka kulttuurinen historia on kytköksissä Pohjois-Amerikkalaiseen 1970-luvulla kasvaneeseen graffiti alakulttuuriin, ja joka sittemmin 1980-luvulla kehittyi kansainväliseksi nuorisokulttuuriksi esittävien populaarikirjojen ja videodokumenttien levityksen myötä. Ensimmäiset graffitimaalaukset ilmestyivät Helsinkiin 1980-luvun puolivälissä, ja graffitit kasvoivat nopeasti täkäläiseksi nuorisokulttuuriksi.

Tutkimus havainnoi kontrollin ja sukupuolen merkityksiä graffitien maalaamisessa, käyden läpi graffitialakulttuurin kohtaamia vaihtelevia yhteiskunnallisia reaktioita. Kuten monissa muissakin Pohjoismaisissa kaupungeissa, Helsingissä kohdennettiin nollatoleranssia graffiteja vastaan Stop töhryille -projektin aikana vuosina 1998 - 2008. Nollatoleranssin aikana luvalliset graffitit kiellettiin ja graffiti taiteenmuotona sensuroitiin monin tavoin. Helsinki lisäsi graffitien rikosvalvontaa tukemalla yksityisen vartiointiyrityksen toimintaa, ja graffitimaalareiden oikeuksia kaupunkitilaan syrjäytettiin. Vuodesta 2009 lähtien Helsinki on vapauttanut suhtautumistaan graffiteja ja katutaiteita kohtaan, ja sopeuttanut näitä taiteenmuotoja osaksi kaupunkikulttuuria tukemalla luvallisilla taideprojekteja, nuorisotyöllä, julkisilla näyttelyillä ja luvallisilla graffiti- ja katutaideseinillä. Nollatoleranssin jälkipyykissä, niin kutsuttu katutaide on kasvattanut merkitystään Helsingin julkisessa tilassa. Vaikka graffitit ja katutaide nähdään kahtena erillisinä taiteenmuotoina, on niillä yhteneväisiä merkityksiä haastamalla kadun visuaalista järjestystä. Graffiteja kuitenkin usein maskulinisoidaan ja katutaidetta feminisoidaan sekä alakulttuurisessa että julkisessa keskustelussa. Nämä sukupuolistetut merkitykset vaikuttavat osaltaan näiden kahden taiteenmuotojen alakulttuuriseen arvostukseen ja tunnustamiseen.

Tutkimuksen konteksti painottuu kasvavaan, poikkitieteelliseen graffiti – ja katutaidetutkimukseen. Teoreettinen kehys on puolestaan rakentunut kulttuuriseen kriminologiaan, painottaen kontrollin kokemusta sukupuolen näkökulmasta.

Pyrkimyksenä on sisällyttää feminististä filosofiaa osaksi kulttuurisen kriminologian teoriasuuntausta. Tutkimus perustuu tutkijan pitkäjänteiseen etnografiseen ääriyöskentelyyn Helsingin graffitialakulttuurisissa. Metodologinen lähestymistapa käsittää aktiivista osallistavaa havainnointia alakulttuurin parissa ja tutkimusaineisto koostuu tutkijan kenttäpäiväkirjasta (2011 – 2019) ja 26 nauhoitetusta haastattelusta viidentoista naisen ja yhdentoista miehen kanssa, iältään 18 – 43 vuotiaita (2014 – 2019). Lisäksi etnografinen aineisto koostuu tuhansista valokuvista, 24:stä Helsingin hovioikeuden tuomilauselmia graffitiasioissa vuosina 2000 – 2018, valtamedian graffitinaiheisiä uutisartikkeleita, graffitinvastaista aineistoa, poliisin esitutkimusmateriaalia graffitiasioissa, suomalaisia graffitilehtiä ja -dokumenttielokuvia, graffitiaiheisia julkaisuja sosiaalisessa mediassa, sekä tutkijan omat muistot ja kokemukset graffitialakulttuurissa.

Tutkimuksen analyysi esittää Helsingin graffitialakulttuurin mieskeskeisyyttä ja identifioi graffitia heteromaskuliinisena toimintana. Alakulttuurisessa kerronnassa ja arkistoinnissa jäävät muut sukupuoliperformatiivisuudet vähemmälle huomiolle. Analyysi osoittaa myös sen, että vain miehiä on haastettu luvattomien graffitien teoista Helsingin hovioikeudessa vuosien 2000 – 2018. Lisäksi, suurin osa hovioikeuden graffitituomiosta on astunut voimaan Stop töhryille -projektin aikana, ja tuomiot vähenevät merkittävästi nollatoleranssin loputtua. Projektin aikakausi on Helsinki graffitille merkittävä alakulttuurinen kertomus. Graffitimaalareiden kokemukset nollatoleranssista ja kiihtyneestä vartijavalvonnasta kovensivat alakulttuurin ilmaisutapoja, ja vahvistivat vihan ja homofobista keskustelutapaa alakulttuurissa. Naisten osallisuus graffitialakulttuurissa on nollatoleranssin jälkeisenä aikana lisääntynyt, ja tutkimus havaitsee feministisen katutaide liikkeen merkitystä nykyiselle Helsinki graffitille. Lisäksi tutkimus käsittelee graffitia kehottomana performatiivisuutena, kun luvattomia graffiteja maalaava keho pyrkii piiloutumaan arkipäiväiseltä ja kontrollin katseelta, haastaen samalla sukupuolisen moninaisuuden tunnistamista. Kiteyttäen, tutkimus kuvaa kontrollin ja sukupuolen liikkuvaa performatiivisuutta graffitialakulttuurissa, ja jakaa analyyttistä viitekehystä kulttuuriselle kriminologialle ja feministiselle filosofialle.

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GLOSSARY

Back jump	Painting graffiti on a train in service during a brief time at a terminal station. Considered risky, but a quick performance completed in few minutes.
Black book	A sketchbook, photo album or digital archive containing pictures of graffiti pieces and street art. Graffiti writers' artistic portfolio.
Bombing	Prolific painting and marking. Doing series of tags or street art over a short period in urban realm.
Buffing, buff	To clean a surface from graffiti.
Check-out	Someone guarding for the benefit of others to paint.
Day-time spot	A place for graffiti painting, possible to paint at daytime and considered a less risky site from a writers' point of view.
End-to-end	Graffiti pieces covering the length of a train carriage.
Fame	Being 'known', subcultural recognition and reputation of a writer. Gained through prolific graffiti writing.
Freights	Cargo trains transporting goods. Often considered less risky to paint, than passenger trains.
Graffiti jam	A get-together and graffiti writers socializing event, including wall painting at hall of fame, legal or semi-legal site.
Hall of fame, fames	A walled painting site regularly used by graffiti writers, often an abandon construction site, or in remote areas.
Marker	A pen filled with ink, good for writing tags.
Panel	A graffiti piece painted below the windows of a train carriage.
Piece, masterpiece	A graffiti painting featuring several colors, stylized letters and a variety of designs.
Spot	A surface or site for graffiti writing or street art, in a variety of different sizes and scales. The size and location correlate with the shape of graffiti (tag, throw-up or piece) and the time spent for completing the art piece.
Spotting	Observing graffiti or street art piece in the urban realm, in subcultural printed media or online in forms of images.
Street bomber	Someone known for being a prolific tag writer, actively tagging in the urban realm.

Sunday writer	Graffiti writer painting mainly day-times and at hall of fames, semi-legal places or legal sites.
System collector	A passionate in train graffiti writer, determinate to paint graffiti on as many different train systems as possible. Thereby 'collecting' different train systems.
Tag	The signature or name a writer or street artist use.
Throw-up	Less complex graffiti painting than a graffiti piece, usually quickly outlined with one or two colors.
Tracksides	Walls along train lines, a good site for graffiti pieces, visible from the passing trains.
Train mission	Going to paint a train, a train writing trip.
Train writer	Graffiti writer known for painting trains.
Whole-car	Graffiti pieces covering the entire surface of a train carriage.
Writers' bench	Urban site where graffiti writers meet, originally referring to train stations considered productive for 'spotting' and photographing train graffiti.

ORIGINAL PUBLICATIONS

- Publication I Fransberg, Malin (2014) “Graffititieto – Etnografinen tutkimus graffitimaalareiden alakulttuurista”. *Oikeus* 2014(3): 291 - 313.
- Publication II Fransberg, Malin (2019) “Performing gendered distinctions: Young women painting illicit street art and graffiti in Helsinki”. *Journal of Youth Studies*, vol. 22(4): 489 – 504.
- Publication III Fransberg, Malin (2020) Spotting Trains: An ethnography of subcultural media practices among graffiti writers in Helsinki. *Nuart Journal*, vol. 2(2): 14 – 27.
- Publication IV Fransberg, Malin, Myllylä, Mari & Tolonen, Jonna (2019) “Embodied Graffiti and Street Art Research”. Sent to review in *Qualitative Research*, April 2019. First draft version.

The publications are referred to in the text by their roman numerals. There is an English translation for Publication I in the appendix.

PROLOGUE

When I wrote this thesis, I had an office room at the Finnish Youth Research Society in a neighborhood renamed *Pasila Street Art District*. I was daily able to observe through my office window when teenagers took selfies in front of the street art pieces – an odd sight ten years ago and not only because of the rarity of smartphones at the time. There were also commercial street art tours visible from the office window and I frequently watched the tourist groups admiring the street art pieces while they enthusiastically documented them. It was easy to imagine the street art guide telling the history of the grey zero tolerance era and about the time when the anti-graffiti project *Stop töhryille* (1998 – 2008) was in charge of the city’s visual sentiment.

Pasila Street Art District, or more commonly East-Pasila is located in central Helsinki. The neighborhood is known for its large-scale concrete surfaces and block building architecture built in the mid 1970s. In summer 2017 a large visual transformation of the district began when the organization *Helsinki Urban Art* invited several domestic and international graffiti and street artists to paint the surfaces in East-Pasila. Today the district is decorated with around eighty legal graffiti and street art works painted on walls, bridges, and staircases in the area. The visual performance now appears at the first sight as a balanced collage of different street art and graffiti pieces on the concrete surfaces. Yet, if you look closer you will find myriads of dramas where struggles for a piece of space have occurred.

One such case was headed in an article by *HSMetro*: “The Czech gift vandalized in East-Pasila”¹. The article said that a street art piece by the artist “ChemiS” from the Czech Republic was destroyed by an unknown vandal, who had “gone over” by doodling black spray-paint over the artwork. The article claims that “going over” is a known pattern in the graffiti subculture and that it may either be caused by not having enough space for wall paintings, or because of the intention of creating “something better” over the former artwork. The article concludes that neither of

¹ HSMetro 9.10.2018: ”Tšekin lahja Itä-Pasilalle joutui vandaalien kynsiin”

these seems to be the case here, as there are legal walls in the city available for anyone, and that the black smudge surely did not make the artwork better.

Doing “something better” as a justification for going over – is a peculiar argument, for art itself is extremely hard to define and moreover a very subjective experience in terms of what makes something meaningful or beautiful. Nevertheless, as also affirmed in the news article, it was certainly, a violent act to do the doodling over other individuals’ artwork. However, the article forges the stylistic meaning of crossing out a street art or graffiti piece. Doodling or lining over an artwork, often described as ‘spitting’ in subcultural terms, is perhaps the strongest way to signal insult and disrespect in graffiti subculture.

We may not know the motives for disrespecting ChemiS’s street art piece, but placing this event in the narrative of graffiti and street art politics in Helsinki may shed some light on the act itself. Graffiti writing and street art was strictly prohibited in the public space of Helsinki during the project of Stop töhryille 1998 - 2008. While all kinds of graffiti and street art used to be forbidden, now *some* graffiti and street art are allowed - in *certain* conditions and on *specific* surfaces. One may thus ask what the substantial difference between the two acts are in the end. Both have used a bit of paint to cover a piece of public surface, although only one of them has been legitimized to create a commissioned public artwork curated by an urban art organization. The act of art controlled, defined and measured on certain surfaces in the public and with specific authorizations probably creates more colorful city districts and surely delights passersby, but it does not always serve the subcultural until someone “goes over” it.

ChemiS’s artwork was not the only one being crossed by unknown individuals, as I during the years observed several other street art pieces being lined over in East-Pasila. But there were other urban dramas to be noted. Now, in March 2019, I noticed from my office window that a couple of ‘buffers’ were washing away an illegal graffiti piece painted next to legal street artwork (see Figure 1 on p. 20). This graffiti piece was not going over any other art piece and could be considered as sophisticated or even as artistically complex. It was composed by several colors, it had 3D-effects on the letters and decorations inside the letters and the technique were as advanced as the street art pieces next to it. The illegal graffiti piece had remained there for a few weeks already, and I often thought about the tourist groups taking photographs or other dwellers passing by, that were probably unaware that this piece was actually unauthorized in comparison to the art pieces next to it.

I ran out on the street to talk to the buffers and discovered that they had a work-career in this business for nearly thirty years. They had detailed knowledge of the history of buffing politics in Helsinki, ever since the first graffiti pieces started to appear in mid 1980s. The buffers were employees of a private company and were here on a job commission ordered by the city. They were aware that the street art pieces painted here were legally produced by famous artists from abroad, and had thus a very functional perspective on the solution to the seemingly endless buffing of illegal pieces: *“This wall should have not been left blank, it should have been covered by a legal piece like the walls next to it.”* While I wondered if it was not a bit of a paradox to buff the illegal graffiti piece while leaving the street art pieces untouched, the buffers extended the illogical aspect even further. They pointed at a blue door covered by colorful tags between the illegal graffiti piece and legal street art piece (see Figure 3, p. 20). The door had a metal surface which apparently invoked graffiti writers to write inked tags on it. These were presumably not a commissioned artwork: *“Unlike the wall here, we will not buff this, because this door does not belong to the municipality, but the local housing company. During the Stop töhrylle - project we would have of course buffed this door too, we buffed everything! It wasn’t like now when every single square meter is calculated by our company and we don’t buff anything for free.”* This made us laugh, from a zero-tolerance period when everything was to be buffed due a 24 hour policy, now even the companies offering graffiti removal are no simple moral guardians of the city politics, but business makers operated by free markets!

Only a few weeks after talking with the buffers, the urban drama took its next step and a new graffiti piece appeared on that very same spot they had buffed (see Figure 2, p. 20). This graffiti piece, probably painted during a night, had the same initials - “CKR” - as the former graffiti piece, indicating that this piece was done by the same actor or actors as the former graffiti piece. Only the colors had changed on the letters - from blue to pink - and the red background to a blue one. On the corner of the piece a small utterance stated simply “Fuck off!”, I assume against the buffing. The blue door belonging to the housing company next to the pieces was still living its own life, perhaps a new tag had appeared. In October 2019, once again this illegal graffiti piece was washed away while the legal street art pieces were left untouched (see Figure 4, p. 20). The stairs on the left side of this buffed wall had apparently become a legal part of this street art corner, while the blue door was still left untouched.

Figure 1. 'Buffers' washing away illegal graffiti piece next to legal street art on Asemapäällikönkatu in East-Pasila. March 2019. Photographer Malin Fransberg.



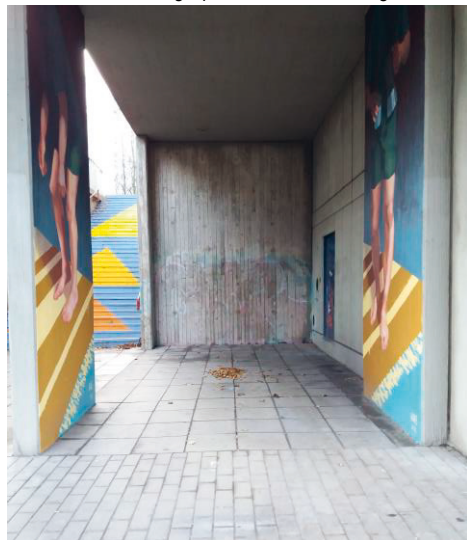
Figure 2. A new illegal graffiti piece. May 2019. Photographer Malin Fransberg.



Figure 3. The blue door of the local housing company. May 2019. Photographer Malin Fransberg.



Figure 4. The empty wall with new street art on stairs on the left. October 2019. Photographer Malin Fransberg



1 IN THE CITY OF 'HELLSINKI'

1.1 Introduction

“This dual city, not spatial segregation and division within the city - although these, of course, occur - but of an ‘underlife’ of the city, runs throughout cultural criminology and is a key concept. It is reminiscent of the insights of the sociology of deviance, where deviance is not marginal but a world bubbling up just under the surface of appearances (a place where ethnography can go, but social surveys merely reflect the surfaces) (...) This is the world where transgression occurs, where rigidity is fudged, where rules are bent, and lives are lived.”

- Jock Young (2011, 106 – 107)

Jock Young (2011) presents the duality of cities as one of cultural criminology's key subjects. The contrast of two images in one city, one where human life is conventional, rationalized, controlled and planned, and one that engages in creativity, mocks the rational and diversifies subcultural styles, is acknowledged in many of the great philosophical works of urban drama (de Certeau 1984; Hayward 2004; Wilson 1991; Raban 1974). This urban experience is compounded by a cultural spirit that intersects with the power and emotions of the city life on a ‘street-level’ (Hayward 2004, 2). In particular, young people have always taken the streets as a site for performing carnival and revolt, while urban planners, control authorities and policy makers have feared for the wild youth as the ‘dangerous classes’ (Austin 2001, 25; Presdee 2000). Other scholars have dismantled the patriarchal construction of planned and rationalized spaces which tend to construct cities into forbidden and permitted spaces for the marginalized, whilst often position women as belonging to private domains (Fenster 2005; Wilson 1991). For Elisabeth Wilson (1991), it is the unruly and autonomous essence in city life that so many times has presented a danger for rational city planning, that creates a contingency - especially for women and other marginal city dwellers. But rather than demonstrating the city as dual, Wilson (1991, 8) talks about the city as a labyrinth when discovering women's second life in the urban consciousness. The city lacks a true center, and once inside you are

only able to walk endless paths. It is the ability to become lost in the labyrinth that offers the carnivalesque, maximum freedom, and a pleasurable intimacy of the city (Wilson 1991, 10). Wilson's historical account of the feminine imagery in the urban points to the freedom associated with anonymity in the city. Nevertheless, subsequent queer critique assesses the hegemonic spatial narrative in which alternative and marginalized subjects from rural move to the city to achieve desired subcultural lives in a place of tolerance (Halberstam 2005). Both feminist and queer critique of urban studies, however, underlines the importance of space and place making when numerous gender performances are lived out in our daily lives. As such, gender reinforces a cultural analysis of spatiality and control – a key theme for cultural criminology.

Now, let me take you to the city of Helsinki and the people I learned about when I moved into the city in 2005. It was the graffiti writers in Helsinki that taught me everything about the creative city, its marginalized people and their underlife. In newspapers they used to be presented as the outcasts of the city and yet, I learned quickly that only a few others would teach me as much about the relationship between young urban residents, security and control. Fifteen years ago, the urban realm was deeply polarized between the graffiti writers, embodied mainly by a mass of young men, and the 'official' city in Helsinki. From the perspective of the young graffiti writers, the official city was represented by the notorious anti-graffiti project "Stop töhryille" with its politics that became known as *zero tolerance*. This project was led by the municipal's Department for Urban Planning in 1998 - 2008 who were active in their statements demonizing graffiti writers as a dangerous class, claiming them as groups of young males with drug addictions, who would only stop graffiti writing if they overdosed or fell in love (Koskela 2009; Brunila et. al. 2011, 37). At the time, many male graffiti writers were prosecuted, sentenced to pay for damages, and in the worst scenario, imprisoned, as the city authorities accompanied with the special graffiti task force at Helsinki police department, the private security company FPS (Finnish Protection Service), and the railway company VR-Group (Valtion Rautatiet) actively cooperated to get graffiti writers in charge.

Graffiti writers used to call their city a 'hell' and graffiti pieces were constantly signed with the sobriquet - *Hellsinki* with two l's. Yet, cities change over time, and it is this constant change in urban politics, dynamics of power, and social life, that makes the city, as Wilson (1991) describes it, a true labyrinth. And if young graffiti writers used to call it "Hellsinki", now in *some* respects the city could be approached

as a paradise for graffiti and the emerging phenomenon of street art. Graffiti and street art are no longer simply understood as crime, but reclaimed as part of the city's cultural aesthetics. The city now administrates a dozen of legal street art walls available for anyone to paint on. The Youth Division of Helsinki City has its own Street Art Bureau *Supafly* with novel ideas of graffiti youth work, such as gender sensitive graffiti workshops. The Bureau also supervises a movable street art wagon, a moving surface that in the 'ecology of graffiti spots' (e.g. Ferrell & Weide 2010; Publication III) is symbolically associated with the subculture's top objects to paint on - the trains and subways. Graffiti and street art is allowed on plywood fences surrounding constructions sites at new residential areas, such as Kalasatama, and the nearby Suvilahti with its DIY-skateparks, its squatted and autonomous youth center Oranssi, its DIY-saunas, spray can shop, breweries, street food restaurants and free walls for graffiti writing, attract youthful and conscious crowds to take part in the pleasurable urban atmosphere. The graffiti subculture in the city of Helsinki has now become known to wider audiences, moreover, through many public art exhibitions, the video documentaries *The New Dictators: Archaeology of Helsinki Graffiti* (2017) and *Just Can't Stop* (2017), and by popular graffiti books (Isomrusu & Jääsekläinen 1998; Kalakivi 2018; Tuulikangas 2018).

During the past decade, the city's zero tolerance policy has changed to a domestication of graffiti and street art - often assigned and controlled to certain surfaces as reflected in the Prologue. The legalizing and commodification of graffiti and street art now provide urban culture for the public, an urban art form that once used to shock its viewers, symbolize dirt, and met with reactions of disgust. This transformation in policy aspects, from strict zero tolerance against a youth subculture to a domestication of an urban folklore, accounts a cultural condition that art historian Jacob Kimwall (2016) describes as 'post-zero tolerance'. Post-zero tolerance reflects the policy change from the anti-graffiti policies during the 1990s and 2000s experienced in many Nordic cities, among them Helsinki, Stockholm, and Oslo (Arnold 2019; Helin 2014; Høigård 2007; Kimwall 2014; 2013; Koskela 2009; Thor 2019). Many of these studies, chiefly documenting the Nordic zero tolerance against graffiti and its interrelated art-crime discourse, have educated us in how the politics of urban planning and control are able to impact and transform both (sub)cultural landscape and young graffiti writer's lives in devastating ways.

Nevertheless, Nordic or Finnish studies in graffiti have engaged less in those absent and different in a taken-for-granted male graffiti subculture. Indeed, young

men as a majority in the graffiti subculture have faced the biggest juridical and economic consequences of the former anti-graffiti policies. However, gender differences and male-dominance have deemed less important in many graffiti studies concerning control, and as such resulted in overlooking the stories by marginal subjects, namely young female graffiti writers and street artists, and those who construct gender identities differently to a binary of ‘males’ and ‘females’. Hence, my suggestion is that post-zero tolerance is not only a condition that reflects a cultural change in a city’s graffiti policy, but also a hegemonic narrative of the local male-dominated graffiti subculture, that subsequently marginalizes different stories of control. Put simply, gender matters for our experience of power and control, our ways of struggling for space in the city, and our sense of belonging to an urban site and to its subcultures.

1.2 Outlining ethnographic aims and research questions

This thesis is a long-term urban ethnographic study on the Helsinki graffiti subculture, consisting of this summary, and four peer-reviewed journal articles (Publications I, II, III and IV). The thesis reflects how graffiti appears as a controlled and gendered youth subculture in the city of Helsinki and engages with a narrative of change in the city’s graffiti politics. The motive for this research project is thus to produce critical knowledge on graffiti writers’ and street artists’ experiences of control, and to relate this experience to gendered framings.

Many feminist ethnographies are profoundly engaged with accounting an epistemological location in the studied field, that is; how knowledge is produced in interaction with the ethnographic field, who decides what kind of questions are asked, and who is enabled to present answers to the questions asked (Ahmed 2000; Skeggs 2001). In ethnographies, the authority of representing someone’s subjective experiences as research knowledge often demands an ontological reflection of how the researcher is immersed in the field. I believe it is therefore important to start by saying that my own experiences of growing up as a woman in a male-dominated and criminalized subculture has motivated much my academic engagement with this subject, and moreover, the ways I tend to express and form questions about graffiti.

My scholarly exploration of the graffiti subculture in Helsinki started in 2011 when I was twenty-four years old and I started to collect ethnographic field notes

amongst graffiti writers of the same age. Yet, my knowledge about graffiti dates to my time as a teenager, when I first started to discover the meanings of graffiti writing. During some years in between the late 2000s and early 2010s, graffiti was part of my daily activities and in some sense the most important thing in my life. One could consider me as an ‘insider’, as I did write tags and paint graffiti pieces, I did learn how to use spray cans (markers I am still bad at), I did create a personal tag-name and at some point, I did almost exclusively socialize with graffiti writers. However, I struggle much with calling myself a ‘graffiti writer’, because such an identity representation deems a subjective feeling of subcultural belonging and level of being active. Therefore, I prefer to call myself a graffiti practitioner, as it includes an academic option beyond subcultural affiliation; you may well write graffiti in the urban space, yet also write *about* graffiti.

Doing long-term ethnography and simultaneously writing a thesis by publications has presented certain obstacles, for there is little ethnographic detail that fits into a journal article, and a lot of qualitative richness is lost in consequence. Therefore, I will make my best to relocate the ethnographic story in this summary as part of an ethical responsibility to treat the research participants’ experiences with respect. I have kept on writing field notes about what I have seen and heard in the field of Helsinki graffiti between 2011 and 2019. During my years of involvement in graffiti subculture, both as an ethnographer and as a practitioner of graffiti, I have encountered several hundred graffiti writers (a clear majority of them identified as men), entered numerous urban sites, and observed graffiti writers both in their nightly and daily works. I have engaged in the practice of photographing train graffiti and immersed me in the subcultural world of graffiti writers by ‘hanging out’ at social events, doing graffiti-related travelling with and lived among graffiti writers. The research is thus based on my active participatory observation conducted in 2011 – 2019, and 26 recorded informant interviews with fifteen women and with eleven men aged 18 – 43. Additional ethnographic material consists of photographs taken from the field, court decisions on graffiti cases at Helsinki Court of Appeal, a collection of mass media news on graffiti, anti-graffiti material, police reports, and subcultural media accounts.

My research interest lays in the meanings of graffiti both as a *controlled subculture* and as a *gendered subculture*. I perceive ‘control’ and ‘gender’ as two interrelated research themes that are dynamically tangled with each other in the graffiti subculture. I see control as a dynamic power that both generate and distracts

different gender performativities in subcultural space. I am particularly concerned with the ways that graffiti is controlled in our society, and how this control often seems to reconstruct the subculture as a masculine space.

Control has the power to present graffiti in different forms. Graffiti may from a juridical perspective be both legally and illegally performed on publicly shared surfaces, ranging from public street art walls to the outer surface of a commuter train carriage. The legitimacy of a graffiti painting is thus often dependent on the object that is painted upon, but also on other circumstances in society that impact how we come to read graffiti either as illegal or legal. Permission from the municipality to paint a wall via a street art project funded by an association is read culturally different than painting a commuter train in the train yard of Ilmala. These different ways of perceiving graffiti are meaningful for the subculture and its subcultural members, because they frame the ways that this subculture is related to society in a larger perspective. Therefore, I am interested in knowing *how control traverses the graffiti subculture?* That is, in what context is graffiti controlled and why? What kind of meanings does control construct in graffiti subculture? How is the subculture affected by attempts to control it?

Graffiti subculture appears to be male dominated worldwide (Macdonald 2001; Pabón-Colón 2018). The crowds of graffiti writers also observed in Helsinki at graffiti walls, at graffiti exhibitions, at house parties, and at other social events have clearly been a field primarily of young men. Moreover, the subculture's predominantly male and heterosexist scope often presents graffiti as a masculine endeavor, whilst marginalizing other gender performativities in the subcultural narrative. The aim is thus to study the Helsinki-based graffiti subculture as a phenomenon that is male dominated, but that recognizes a significant increase in active female participants. Furthermore, I attempt to understand how gender in the graffiti subculture is performed between the impact of control structures, that is the various ways graffiti is both formally and informally controlled. Thus, my second interest is in *how gender is performed in the graffiti subculture.* That is, how is gender recognized in graffiti? What kind of bodies are marginalized in the framings of the control system? How is gender identified in anonymous graffiti writers, who only leave their tags on the surface of the city? How are sexuality and gender relations performed upon, or in opposition to normative expectations, such as heterosexuality?

A broader and a general research question for the dissertation identifying both themes of control and gender can subsequently be defined as:

What are the dynamic meanings of control and gender in the Helsinki based graffiti subculture?

1.3 The rest of the story

In this thesis, graffiti is approached as a youth subculture that has cultural traditions primarily associated with the North American graffiti subculture dating to the 1960s, and that developed to an international youth subculture during the 1980s. Since the 2000s, ‘street art’ has emerged as a compelling autonomous urban art movement and is often related to, though much divorced from ‘deviant’, ‘aggressive’ or ‘criminal’ graffiti. While the two overlapping urban artforms will be further pinpointed in Chapter 2, at this point it is relevant to note, that a minority of the research participants interviewed for this study, were more interested in doing street art than graffiti, and that most of the street artists that were interviewed were women.

Aside from this significant minority of street artists, I will primarily use *graffiti subculture* or *Helsinki graffiti* as the overarching concepts when referring to the research field, as a majority of my informants (both women and men) were graffiti writers. Moreover, I am primarily interested in the criminalization of graffiti, and its relation to as a gendered subculture. Moreover, from the two artforms, graffiti has since the late 1980s in Helsinki faced many more political and crime control challenges than street art. In addition, graffiti as a distinct youth subculture has overridden the public discussion of an art-crime binary, which has long been a common problem formulation when discussing the forms of societal reactions and crime control on the subject matter (Austin 2001; Kimwall 2014). Street art is nevertheless a growing phenomenon in Helsinki, but to give the research recognition it serves would require an own study on *Helsinki street art*.

I will now proceed to briefly describe the content of this study. Two following chapters are contextual frames for this research project. *Chapter 2* pays attention to graffiti as a distinct youth subculture shaped around the visual culture of writing in the urban space, yet also describes graffiti as a gendered street subculture by presenting some of the previous research literature. *Chapter 3* portrays graffiti as a controlled phenomenon, especially within the Nordic and national scopes. It takes a

historical approach to examine the ways that graffiti in Helsinki became a sign for deviancy and how the “Stop töhryille” project took zero tolerance as its main method to combat graffiti and street art in the city.

Chapter 4 provides a theoretical frame for this research, that theorizes the concepts of control and gender from a cultural criminological perspective. Cultural criminology has been righteously criticized for its lack of focus on gender (e.g. Naegler & Salman 2016) and this is a gap that will be further addressed in Chapter 4. Yet, cultural criminology allows for the study of a subculture and its members from a perspective that pays importance to social and cultural meanings on both institutional levels, as well on an agency level. As such, it is possible to follow control and gender as structures that runs through everyday life, in powerful regimes that constitute institutional law, and all the way to face-to-face interactions. I do not think that a subculture and its gendered ‘styles’ should be just studied from the ‘inside’-the analysis also needs some perspective on where the subculture is placed in a larger picture, and that reveals how the subculture is controlled, oppressed, integrated, welcomed or treated in other ways from ‘outside’. This dialect between inside and outside worlds acknowledges that subcultures are diverse in terms of class, gender, and ethnicities, yet stresses the importance of how control and power tend to treat subcultural individuals located in these intersections differently.

The methodological approach and further reflections on the ethnographic material will be scrutinized in detail in *Chapter 5*. The chapter examines the long-term critical urban ethnography, a methodology that allows for knowledge that is produced in a spatial dialogue between several standpoints and resources (Garrett 2013; Madison 2012). The Publications (I – IV) will also be presented in Chapter 5. The analytical *Chapters 6* and *7* will further discuss the findings of the Publications. Additionally, two academic book chapters previously published by the author (Fransberg 2018; 2019) have influenced the analysis in Chapter 6 and 7. Both book chapters deal with gender in Helsinki graffiti subculture and are cited accordingly and listed in the references. Some ethnographic material that has gained little focus in the journal articles will be more comprehensively analyzed in the analytical chapters. In particular, this is the case for the juridical documents concerning graffiti cases held at the Helsinki courts, for a number of news reports describing graffiti writers in Helsinki, and for subcultural accounts representing alternative gender performances. Chapter 6 focuses on crime control and the sanctions graffiti writers, predominantly young men, have faced during the period of zero tolerance (1998 –

2008). It presents how series of public street protests in Helsinki became a crucial platform for collective critique against zero tolerance policy. It also deals with how homophobic discourses became a part of graffiti subcultures' raging rhetoric against the local security company specialized in graffiti prevention. Chapter 7 deals with the less seen and emerging gender dynamics in Helsinki graffiti, mainly in the era of post-zero tolerance. It approaches the themes of graffiti as a disembodied by exemplifying how female bodies present an enigma for both controlling authorities and in subcultural archives. Finally, it looks at how different forms of masculinity may contribute to the criminalized vision of graffiti masculinity, and discuss the potential for change in the subculture's gender relations.

1.4 Some basic terminology

Before turning to the next chapter, I will briefly discuss the role of different languages involved in the research process. I have formally and informally interviewed graffiti writers and street artists in Finnish, but also in Swedish and English. I have also written field notes in a mixed manner in Finnish, Swedish and English. I also use quotations from Finnish literature, news-articles, and other media resources. Although all quotations in the thesis are translated to English, there are often local variations of slang words that have been difficult to translate. This implies that the graffiti subculture, as a transnational youth subculture, has also locally created argot and cultural variations. One such word is *töbry*, a term for the deviant, bad and ugly graffiti in the Finnish language. *Töbry* plays an important part in the discursive formation of graffiti as deviant in the Finnish debate on graffiti and therefore deserves a more detailed discussion in Chapter 3. However, it is at this point important to acknowledge that the term *töbry* was not widely used in the Finnish language as concept for deviant graffiti until it was invoked through the discourse of the *Stop töbrylle* -project. It is difficult to find a direct translation of the term in English, and therefore I will keep the project's name in its Finnish form.

I would like to further note the term *Helsinki graffiti* in a few words. Helsinki graffiti is a concept, which I use in this thesis when I refer to the specific field in focus for this research. It is not necessary a geographic place, rather a discursive concept that frames the narrative and the history of the local graffiti and its complex (sub)culture in the Finnish capital area. Graffiti is in its physical essence often short-

lived, but its spirit continues in the oral stories told by graffiti writers, in subcultural media, popular literature, but also in mass media framings and in institutional documents. In short, Helsinki graffiti is a space that reconnects with the already established documentative archives and the ongoing discursive formation of ideas about what graffiti in Helsinki is about.

Graffiti as a term is also discussed in Chapter 2, and I will here only note on *who* it is that I speak about when I use the term *writer*. Graffiti painters and artists often call themselves as *graffiti writers* or simply writers, and in the local subcultural term “wraitteri” is commonly used for those who present themselves as part of the graffiti subculture (e.g. Helin 2014, 24; Isomursu & Jääskeläinen 1998). The language used in the ethnographic field in Helsinki usually framed gender as a prefix only when marking a woman graffiti writer, while male gender was typically presented in a gender-neutral and unmarked form - simply as a ‘writer’. There were terms used among informants such as *chick painters* (mimmi-peinttari), referring to women who paint both graffiti and street art, and *chick writer* (muija-wraitteri) referring to a woman focusing solely on graffiti writing. In order to break from this male-normative language, I will mark gender by writing man/male graffiti writer/street artist and woman/female graffiti writer/street artist in cases where cisgender is identified as either female or male. In many of the cases, I will simply use a chosen pseudonym for the informant, a female or male name.

Jessica Pabón-Colón (2018, 3) for example applies the term ‘graff grlz’ in her feminist study of female graffiti writers to mark the youthfulness in the subculture and the ideological conversation with the feminist Riot Grrl punk scene. However, I will avoid the term girl and boy, because the terms ‘girling’ (tytöttely) and ‘boying’ (pojuttelu) are in Finnish language at times used as degrading terms in social situations amongst graffiti writers observed on the field, and because my informants were generally young adults, with most of them being aged between 25 and 35. On the other hand, ‘girls’ or ‘boys’ were sometimes used as affectionate terms in the field when marking a close relationship and a certain ‘we-ness’, such as in “us girls” or “we boys”. Girl- and boy -terms are hence only used if an original quotation cited uses these terms, or if it is significant to mark an informant’s young age. For groups of graffiti writers and street artists who are composed of people from more than one gender, I will refer to these terms in plural, hence graffiti writers or/and street artists.

Some might note that I use both the concept of *zero tolerance policy* and *zero tolerance politics*. The former concept relates mainly to formal policy regulations and

institutionalized rules within a municipal or in the law. The latter concept is a more of an umbrella term, and relates to the institutional policy, but also to a wider political and cultural atmosphere, that for example influences the media discourses and the ways graffiti is signified as a crime or as an art during different policy periods.

Finally, many graffiti and street art studies are fueled by subcultural terms that may be unknown to readers not familiar with this subject. Therefore, these studies often include a subcultural glossary. You may find one glossary developed for this dissertation on page *vii*.

2 GRAFFITI AS A YOUTH SUBCULTURE

2.1 Graffiti as urban writings

Graffiti is a complex concept that is approached quite differently in the plethora of meanings this term seems to capture. Though this thesis focuses on graffiti as a specific youth subculture, I would like to take a brief moment to reflect on the concept of graffiti in terms of a broader scope. Initially, graffiti has referred to scratchings, doodlings and writings on public surfaces perhaps not originally intended for it (e.g. Bushnell 1990; Rees 1981). As an archeological concept, graffiti has referred to the ancient messages and drawings found in public space during the Roman Empire (Baird & Taylor 2010), but also to the folk tradition of devotional graffiti in the Orthodox church (Bushnell 1990), the freighthopping ‘hobo’ writings on freight trains (Lennon 2016), and to historical prison subcultures (Wilson 2008). Since the early nineteenth century, we have also seen graffiti in public bathrooms, political graffiti on the streets, racist graffiti, ‘gang’ graffiti, children’s chalk graffiti in playgrounds and in school yards, and football fan graffiti decorating many of the European stadiums (Bushnell 1990; Hastings 1984; Green 2003; Lynn & Lea 2005; Phillips 1999; Tolonen 2016). Graffiti is hence not only a form of urban writings, but an aesthetic concept that reflects visually the different narratives of people living, staying, or visiting a place.

It is reasonable to state that aesthetically diverse forms of graffiti have developed alongside the increase in shared urban public spaces. However, graffiti is usually understood as an unauthorized form of urban writing, yet as a tool for researching human culture, it functions as a *methodology* that visually traces not only the present but the past societies and their material cultures (Kindynis 2019, 28). As such, graffiti offers a unique method to analyze society and its variety of subcultures in distinct times. Graffiti takes different forms and styles of urban writing, while it carries several derivational influences and cultural connotations. What the different forms of graffiti all have in common is that they present a grassroot-level of communication which proves a human existence in urban milieus and in shared places. As a

grassroot-level of communication, graffiti is different from the commercial billboards that are permitted by economic investment, and to other official signs that present authoritative institutions, such as the infrastructure agencies. As a self-authorized message in a shared space graffiti presents a fundamental act of stating 'I am', for example in the anonymous form of writing a tag-name (e.g. Ferrell 1996; Macdonald 2002; Snyder 2009) or alternatively, a collective statement of what one stands for, sometimes an idolization of a rock band (Bushnell 1990), or as a political statement (Tolonen 2016). As such, graffiti is quite a strong form for the expression of belonging to space, a representation of an urban subject, and a 'self' in a place or a city.

As long as there has been graffiti there have been attempts to remove it. These urban writings that claim their own right to exist on the 'canvases' of the city are not always welcomed altruistically, they are often criminalized, controlled and rarely accepted without certain conditions (Ferrell 1996; Kimwall 2014). Graffiti is then often approached as vandalism: a defacing of public or private property. As part of the removal industries enforced by urban authorities, graffiti is not only ephemeral but also 'liquid': it moves, changes, and disappears, as it is white-washed to exist in new forms of archives, such as photography, magazines and videos (Ferrell & Weide 2010). Once graffiti no longer exists physically in public space, it may continue its presence in virtual spaces, such as those offered by the platforms of social media (e.g. MacDowall 2019). As such, graffiti is created from contradictions, and while it can be understood as a historic concept, folklore, artistic or a youthful expression, it is also denoted as deviant and vandalistic practice: as meaningless dirt on the public walls and surfaces.

This paradox of graffiti – both as 'art' and 'vandalism' – presents a well known dualism of graffiti (Kimwall 2014). Influenced by Michel Foucault's (1972) theory of discourses, Kimwall (2014, 12 – 13) suggests *graffiti as a discursive formation*, that is produced both in and beyond its distinct subcultural practice and in relation to institutions of power, such as the State law or a cultural industry, that engage in defining and framing the concept of graffiti. I apply Kimwall's notion of graffiti as a discursive formation, however, rather than explicitly engaging in the art-crime debate of graffiti, my attention is drawn on how graffiti as a reciprocated formation by both subcultural and institutional agents create graffiti's gendered representations that are entangled and invested by structures of control.

2.2 Graffiti and street art research

I place this research under the broader field of contemporary graffiti and street art research (GSAR) which, since the 1980s, has grown to a large interdisciplinary research field. GSAR include perspectives chiefly from sociologists, criminologists, subculturalists, and art historians, while art designers, urban planners, scholars of media and communication, and cultural geographers have lately enriched the field (Ross et. al. 2017; Ross 2017; Young 2014). As a point of an academic legacy, a growing number of yearly GSAR conferences are today held by scholars in Europe, such as *The Tag Conference*, *Lisbon Street Art & Urban Creativity Conference*, and *Lund Urban Creativity*. Moreover, at least two academic and peer-reviewed journals, *Nuart Journal* and *SAUC - Street Art and Urban Creativity Scientific Journal* are dedicated to this field. These platforms have become important venues for legitimizing graffiti and street art studies in the broader academic field (Ross, et. al. 2017).

Besides a scholarly literature, a massive body of popular literature exists on graffiti and street art. These include documentative, photographic and journalistic contributions to graffiti and street art and, at times, the only providers documenting graffiti and street art subculture (e.g. Cooper & Chalfant 1984; Mailer & Naar 1974). The popular literature on graffiti and street art is empirically and visually rich, and often include interviews with graffiti writers and street artists, and photographs of their art pieces. In the Nordic context, for example, the publisher *Dokument Press* is specialized in themes on urban culture and has, since 2000, published a number of important books comprising local graffiti subculture (e.g. Jacobson 2000; Jacobson & Barenthin Lindblad 2003; Barenthin Lindblad & Jacobson 2006). Moreover, three important books have documented the history of Helsinki graffiti (Bogdanoff 2009; Isomursu & Jääskeläinen 1998; Kalakivi 2018). While these are also primarily considered as popular literature, the book *Helsinki graffiti* by Anne Isomursu and Tuomas Jääskeläinen (1998) is based in Isomursu's (1995) academic master thesis in folklore.

With a flourishing merge of scholars and authors originating from different fields, GSAR subsequently lacks a common theoretical and methodological approach, yet a mutual topic often discussed is *the similarities and differences between graffiti and street art* (Ross 2017). Almost every contemporary thesis on the subject area approaches this question or has a subchapter intended for this discussion (e.g., Arnold 2019; Kimwall 2014; MacDowall 2019; Thor 2018). While there is little consistency on the

differences and similarities between graffiti and street art, a content based, cultural and historical distinction between the two is often offered (Ross 2017).

Graffiti is often described as consisting of letters, constituted by the practice of writing tags in urban space, and often referred to the specific youth subculture that originated in 1960s Philadelphia and 1970s New York (Austin 2001; Castleman 1982; Lachman 1988). Graffiti as a distinct youth subculture entails the visible circulation of a graffiti writer's personal *tag*-name (one's personal graffiti nick-name), as well the *crew*-tag (graffiti writers' group-name) written by spray-paint or felt-tipped markers in public space, on walls and fences or on movable objects, such as trains and metros. Graffiti as a part of a distinct youth subculture typically comprise three aesthetic forms; the *tag* (often executed quickly using one color), the *throw-up*, sometimes named as *throwie* (an outlined tag painted in minutes, using one to three colors) and the *master piece* (a large, complex and time-consuming graffiti painting with multiple colors). Ethnographies of graffiti subculture usually include detailed descriptions of the styles and functions of these three aesthetic graffiti forms (Ferrell 1996, 57 – 100; Macdonald 2002, 70 – 83; Snyder 2009, 32 – 46).

Art historian Joe Austin (2001, 41, 61) defines the type of graffiti writing described above as an aesthetic game of name writing in the city that is never static and is continuously re-created by the masses of urban youth. It thus tends to develop through time and place and therefore has local variations. As mentioned in the previous section, graffiti is ephemeral in its nature, for it often becomes removed and sanitized in public space. As a result of its ephemerality, graffiti subculture has an impressive body of work engaged in chronicling, archiving and documentation, that facilitates graffiti as a mediated and transnational movement (Austin 2001, 249; Kimwall 2014, 37 – 40). Moreover, subcultural media production has in contemporary times constructed a massive online graffiti and street art subculture (MacDowall 2019). Some scholars therefore suggest that the complex relationship between media and graffiti is in fact the construction of the subcultural phenomenon itself, rather than being a simple re-representation of an existing urban reality (Jacobson 2015; Kimwall 2014, 39).

Street art is both visually and conceptually a complicated term to define, and tends to, at times be described as part of the graffiti movement, particularly in institutional frames, but both graffiti writers and street artists tend to separate these concepts as distinctively different. As an autonomous art movement divided from graffiti, street art has still a quite newly recognized scholarly literature (Bengtson 2014; Young

2014). Street art is often described as an outcome of graffiti subculture, and thus is sometimes referred as “post-graffiti” or “neo-graffiti” (Bengtson 2014; Schacter 2013; Wacklawek 2011; Young 2014). Norwegian criminologist and graffiti scholar Cecilie Hoigård propose the term “para-graffiti” which refers to street art’s parallel development to the classical form of graffiti writing (2007, 61). Other scholars propose street art as an umbrella term for all kinds of unauthorized urban art, including graffiti (Andersson 2006). While a myriad of different terms exists, I will use the term street art, for it tends to be the most common concept used both in the Finnish vernacular language (‘katutaide’) as well in the existing literature. It also proposes an independent notion of this form of urban creativity as not necessarily part of graffiti, even if the two should be recognized as interrelated practices that co-exist and influence each other in many aspects.

Street art is often described as more figurative in its style. It uses a wide range of techniques, such as stenciling, stickers, posters, guerilla knitting and artistic installations in urban space. It is less strict in its aesthetic forms compared with graffiti, but is also described as more appealing to a general audience (Bengtson 2014). Street art manages to have a function that communicates with any passerby, while graffiti, as a distinct youth subculture, tends to speak to its own crowd (Ferrell 1996; Macdonald 2001). Street art easily invites its audience to approach public space in playful, imaginative ways, while proposing democratic ways of using a shared space. Such aesthetic dimensions are for example found in the Swedish artist *Adams’* works (Adolfsson 2006). One of his street art projects in the early 2000s was named *Taking Place/Owning Space*. This project aimed to allow access and establish places usually unavailable to the general public by opening up tunnels and hidden highway off-ramps and to design them instead as spaces for rest and leisure (Adolfsson 2006, 19).

Street art is also often understood as less deviant than graffiti, and at times street art is the preferred terminology to be used in institutional contexts in order to convey legal forms for street art and graffiti writing (Kimwall 2014, 19 - 20; Ross, et. al. 2017; Young 2014, Wacklawek 2011). Graffiti and street art then often create a dichotomy between illegal, bad, deviant art, and legal, nice and lovely art as we for example have seen in the prologue. Street art’s status as a generally more accepted art form is perhaps one reason why graffiti writers tend to resist an association with street art (e.g. Macdonald 2002, 168). But the relationship between the two is somewhat fluid; graffiti subculture has for example a long history of developing distinct characters

and comic figures often claimed as significant in the assembly of large graffiti murals and stylistic paintings. For example, *Subway Art*, the prominent book presenting the historic graffiti writing culture on New York's subways, has a section dedicated to characters. Characters are here applauded as the graffiti writer's own self-image while quoting *Tracy168*: "When you got enough *balls* to waste paint and try something *new*, that's when you're a writer!"² (Cooper & Chalfant 2006[1984], 80). Another overlapping practice between graffiti writers and street artist is recognized in sticker art, also known as sticker bombing (Krupets & Vasileva 2019). Stickers may depict characters, symbols or tag-names and they reclaim space in the city space in particular ways when slapped into collages constituted by different stickers on a sticker spot, such as a metal pole or a trash bin. In particular, the "Hello, My Name Is ____" - sticker has become a classic and widely used format among graffiti writers worldwide (Austin 2001, 246 – 247).

Despite a complexity of terms and styles, graffiti and street art both explore non-commissioned forms of urban creativity in public space, while often sharing, contesting, and claiming a mutual space. While the contemporary research on graffiti and street art is extensive and broad in its discussion, my focus will now narrow down to research literature on *graffiti as a distinct youth subculture*. In the following three sections, I will first introduce a descriptive note on the graffiti subculture, and then turn to some of the most referred previous studies on graffiti subculture. Notably, these are studies made by men of men, whilst many of them focus on the clashes, tensions and bridges between an underground subculture and formal society. Finally, the third section focus on how gender and in particularly the male-dominance and gender performativities in graffiti subculture is explored in previous studies.

2.2.1 Graffiti subculture: A brief history, locality, and other formal aspects

A distinct form of graffiti youth subculture can be traced to the tradition of the *graffiti loners* in early 1960s Philadelphia (Stewart [1978]2009). Loners were pre-dominantly a group of colored male youth with Caribbean- and Afro-American background, who took the subways in New York and Philadelphia as a top objective to paint on, thus graffiti subculture became first known as *spraycan art* or *subway art* (Austin 2001; Castleman 1982; Stewart [1978]2009). Distinct to other forms of graffiti at the time

² My emphasis.

in North America, such as the ‘gang’ graffiti marking territory, the loners mission in 1960s was simply to get their own individual names up on the streets as a genuine representation of an urban ‘self’ (Stewart [1978]2009). Over time these graffitied names, or ‘tags’, became aesthetically advanced and visually multifaceted, while technologies around spray paint developed and the availability of them increased. It is these aesthetic traditions of ‘graffitiing’ anonymous names in the city space that ultimately grew to one of the largest transnational youth subcultures today.

Graffiti expanded in popularity through the convergence of hip hop culture. The hip hop culture portrays an aesthetics attributed to Caribbean- and Afro-American urban youth in North American industrialized towns during 1970s and 1980s (Austin 2001, 201 – 206; Colón-Pabón 2018, 33). Hip hop can be understood as a cross-over, or a cultural unit of several street cultures, that became an important form of self-expression in particular for the youth of color in New York (Austin 2001, 202). Graffiti is hence often framed as part of the hip hop culture, in which it is understood as one of its ‘five elements’, together with DJing, MCing and breakdancing, thus by some scholars also called as ‘hip hop graffiti’ (e.g. Colón-Pabón 2018; Ferrell 1996).

From the early 1980s, graffiti writing rapidly became popular likewise among youth in Finland especially through the spread of the seminal hip hop documentaries *Style Wars* (1983) and *Beat Street* (1984), and the book *Subway Art* (Cooper & Chalfant 1984) presenting graffiti writing on New York’s subways. The first wave of graffiti writers in Finland are thus often named as the ‘hip hoppers’ (Helin 2014; Isomursu & Jääskeläinen 1998; Lähteenmaa 1991). However, among my own research participants, the relationship to hip hop was split; while some graffiti writers highly valued the cultural connection to hip hop, others perceived it as an ironic mainstream representation of graffiti. The Finnish graffiti subculture has, as well, been related to subcultures such as heavy metal and punk culture (Isomursu & Jääskeläinen 1998; Kalakivi 2018). For example, a LP record published in 2015 by a Finnish hardcore punk band called T.E.K. is covered by a graffiti piece painted by the graffiti writer “J-Tek” on an old Finnish commuter train (see Figure 5). Many song lyrics on the record describe graffiti writers’ experiences of control, surveillance and zero tolerance politics. Graffiti writers in Finland have also often shared subcultural spaces with other subcultural scenes. For example, the first organized graffiti jams in the early 1980s were held at ‘Lepakoluola’, a significant stronghold for a wide range of different Finnish youth subcultures (e.g. Isomursu & Jääskeläinen 1998).

Figure 5. Cover of a vinyl record of the Finnish hardcore punk band T.E.K. Reproduced with permission. Copyright Hakaniemi Hardcore.



Moreover, houses squatted by activists, anarchists and punks in the 2000s often provided space for graffiti painting during times when no official legal walls were available, for example the former ‘Squat Elimäenkatu 15’ in Helsinki. Graffiti has thus over time become understood as a subcultural institution not necessarily only connected to or originating from hip hop, but influenced by a broad set of cultural variations.

Graffiti is also visually influenced by different styles and develops locally distinct appearances. Finnish graffiti is sometimes described as an ‘ignorant’ form of graffiti, and referred as ‘anti-style’, ‘ghetto-style’ or ‘hipster-graffiti’, while often taking direct influences from the early raw New York style performed on the subways³. The visual influence of the early New York graffiti has long been devoted to the aesthetics of psychedelia and underground comix (Austin 2001, 44), that is apparent in for example the Finnish graffiti magazine *Adults*. This kind of graffiti depicts humor and childish style, while questioning what is considered as technique or stylistically impressive. But the New York influence is perhaps not the sole reason for Finland’s native style. This style of graffiti is relatively quick to paint which is suitable for cold winters below zero degrees, but also for when graffiti in general is difficult to be painted and the risk for being caught is prominent, such as in zero tolerance spaces.

³ “4 keys to understand ignorant graffiti”, 09.01.2016: <https://www.mtn-world.com/en/blog/2016/01/09/4-keys-to-understand-ghetto-style/> (1.3.2021)

The question of graffiti writers' *age* and whether graffiti is a *youth* subculture is another ambiguous theme linked to this study. A Finnish survey study exploring the usage of legal graffiti walls in Helsinki concluded an average age of graffiti writers' was below, yet nearly thirty, and that approximately 46% of them were aged between 26 and 35 (Helin 2014, 77). Ageing is certainly an apparent consequence of the progression of time, and if the first wave of graffiti writers in 1980s Finland were children or teenagers (Isomursu & Jääskeläinen 1998), today these individuals are in between their forties and fifties. Most of the graffiti writers and street artists I met during ethnographic observations were young adults and a majority of my informants were between the ages of twenty-five and forty. For many of them graffiti writing was introduced at a young age and graffiti still remained an important part of one's identity and life experience. While graffiti writers' ageing out and the transitions to adulthood have much relevance for present study, in particular when understanding the consequences of crime sanctions amongst the generation of graffiti writers that experienced zero tolerance, I will here only briefly note some of its aspects noted in previous literature, as my main focus of this thesis is linked to aspects of gender and control.

In many ways has graffiti writing configured the themes of youth resistance and a type of a generational conflict, in which young graffiti writers challenge adult ways of using and belonging to urban space (Austin 2001; Kimwall 2015). Many early North-American studies identified graffiti writers as children and teenagers, and claimed that this practice would diminish at the latest by the time writers reached their early twenties - as a result of their general socialization into mainstream society and because the sanctions for writing graffiti increased when getting older (Castleman 1982; Lachman 1988, Stewart [1978]2007). A teenager tagging in the neighborhoods is still surprisingly prominent representation of the graffiti writer, and often the young age is used as an argument for zero tolerance against graffiti (Kimwall 2015). Yet, some of present studies question whether graffiti today simply represents a youth subculture and points that graffiti writers' complex relations to the subculture often adjust to individual life courses (Helin 2014; Kimwall 2015; Kramer 2010; MacDiarmid & Downing 2012; Monto, et. al. 2013). For example, Laura MacDiarmid and Steven Downing (2012) studied a group of ageing graffiti writers in Canada, and suggested that their ties to the subculture is culturally sensitive to a "drift" between a conventional adult life and illegal graffiti writing. When the studied graffiti writers begun to form adult social bonds, some integrated their

subcultural practices towards more legitimate sphere, that subsequently created subcultural tensions when “going mainstream” (MacDiarmid & Dowering 2012, 613). Engaging in illicit graffiti albeit not necessary longer painting it may also include the practice of remembering it. Malcolm Jacobson (2020) has recently explored how middle age men construct their belonging to graffiti subculture through memory and story-telling, with the help of technologies afforded by social media that forms specific mnemonic communities among graffiti writers.

The ageing of youth subcultures has led scholars elsewhere to question narrow definitions of both ‘youth’ and ‘subculture’, and to note that subcultural members are often able to sustain their youthful subcultural affiliation along family life and adult carriers (Bennett & Hodkinson 2012), with graffiti serving as no exception. Graffiti has in many aspects become a multigenerational subculture, which has possibly also eased the subculture towards more legitimate conditions. Whilst legal career paths that develops subcultural leisure into creative occupations is noted elsewhere in graffiti studies (Snyder 2009), this point of view on youth transitioning to adulthood often presumes a middle-class epistemology, while giving less attention to which individuals are actually able to transfer their subcultural capital into economic wealth. Some subcultural members may indeed acquire higher positions in society, and become involved in art markets, art galleries or other cultural institutions. A prime example in Finland is the former Minister of Culture and Sport, Paavo Arhinmäki, who also is known as a graffiti writer in the Helsinki-based graffiti subculture. However, other aspects of ageing and transitions among graffiti writers should be studied more, such as the classed differences between individuals who continue with painting trains or doing illicit street ‘bombing’. A life between sanctioned graffiti writing and conventional adulthood could also present an interesting theme to the ‘second life’ on the streets - a cultural criminological self-conception that escapes an increasingly rationalized and controlled adult life (Presdee 2000). The graffiti writers’ ‘split self’ between a conventional and a subcultural life has been distinguished previously, albeit as an age-related masculine career that lessens when one receives enough respect and ‘fame’ among other subcultural members (Macdonald 2002, 188, 221).

2.2.2 Previous research on graffiti subculture

A moderate amount of the most cited academic studies on graffiti subculture is, needless to say, in English and mainly North American (Austin 2001; Castleman 1982; Ferrell 1996; Lachmann 1988; Macdonald 2002; Snyder 2009; Stewart [1978]2009). These studies are mostly ethnographic in their style and can be placed in a canon that partly mirrors the different paradigms of youth subcultural theory, ranging from Chicago School (e.g. Thrasher 1927), the Birmingham School and Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) (e.g. Hall & Jefferson 1977; Hebdidge 1979), and finally the so-called post-subcultural studies (e.g. Muggleton 2000). Similar to the Chicago School, the first graffiti scholars were primarily using urban participatory observation, participant interviewing and photography, whilst referring to mass-media reports as part of plain ethnographic descriptions of the graffiti subculture (Castleman 1982; Stewart [1977]2009). Later scholars have continued to employ qualitative research approach, whilst exploring graffiti writers as a subordinated class of youths resisting hegemonic notions of urban space (Austin 2001; Ferrell 1996; Lachmann 1988), and yet the more recent studies have brought post-subcultural explanations in graffiti writers' identity constructions (Macdonald 2002; Snyder 2009).

Sociologist *Craig Castleman* (1982) conducted one of the first academic studies of graffiti subculture, *Getting Up: Subway Graffiti in New York*. Castleman was a student of Margaret Mead and Louis Forsdale. His academic advisers suggested that he should write a strictly descriptive study on graffiti, and thus the book consists of lengthy transcriptions and stories told by graffiti writers that are nevertheless comprehensively informative (Castleman 1982, x; see also Kimwall 2014, 9 – 10). Castleman interviewed many of the graffiti writers actively painting the New York subway in late 1970s, and concluded that the graffiti writers represented numerous ethnic groups and were “among the few young people to reach beyond the bounds of their own neighborhoods and travel throughout the city, meeting and getting to know young people from other boroughs and a variety of ethnic and economic groups.” (Castleman 1982, 71).

Castleman also recognized a significant subcultural narrative for graffiti that would be later echoed in many cities beyond the United States. He did not only describe the graffiti writer's desire for “getting up” their graffiti pieces on New York's subways, and the ways writers orient to both style (quality) and productivity

(quantity) to form recognition, “fame” and to increase their subcultural status. He also identified political attempts to combat graffiti in the anti-graffiti programs enforced by the New York City’s (NYC) government and the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA). In a final note, Castleman (1982, 176 – 177) describes an ineffective but costly war against subway graffiti, while illustrating the differing point of views on graffiti proposed by a transit authority chairman and a graffiti writer:

“I fully understand that graffiti is not in the same category as murder or robbery. However, it is a symbol that we have lost control. If we are to regain control of our system, we must have the assistance of the media in portraying graffiti for what it is – a wanton act of vandalism that should be punishable by incarceration.” (Richard Ravitch)

“If they didn’t buff the trains, then every car would have a whole-car and people would like that. It would be like Disneyworld on tracks, and be one of the serious things to see in New York. People would come from all over just to look at it.” (Lee)

Both Richard Ravitch and Lee here predict future visions of graffiti. During the later part of 1980s, graffiti became a symbol for disorder in mass-media reports when politicians and authorities were promoting what was then named as the “war” on graffiti in NYC (Austin 2001, 147). Yet, today graffiti subculture is supported by many municipalities and cultural institutions, which represents a resource for a new kind of tourism in many global cities (Georgiou 2013, 86). New York is considered as the graffiti’s birth place by many graffiti enthusiasts, and despite the New York subway being cleaned long ago, graffiti writers from all over the world still travel to experience the atmosphere in the city and in some cases, even to paint the subway.

Another early well-known study on graffiti subculture, “Graffiti as a career and ideology” was published as a journal article by Richard Lachmann (1988). This sociological article takes a more theoretical approach to graffiti by citing both Howard Becker’s (1963) idea of deviant career opportunities and Dick Hebdidge’s (1979) view on youth subcultures as a counterhegemonic form of resistance against the ruling classes. Lachmann identifies the different stages in graffiti writers’ careers, from novice taggers (“toys”) to prominent muralists (“kings”), who eventually transition from subway surfaces to canvases in art galleries to start an artistic career. Interestingly, Lachmann (1988, 242) notes graffiti writers’ unconventional relation to art institutions:

“Graffiti’s historical development is sociologically interesting because the original writers did not emerge from other art worlds. Few had studied art in school, and none were practicing professionals. I was unable to find evidence that any writers had been active in the Latin American or Caribbean folk art worlds that also produce murals. The original graffiti muralists could be viewed as naïve artists in that they lacked any sort of training yet produced new forms of art that incorporated diverse elements of mass culture.”

He moreover notes how the art institutions’ involvement in graffiti subculture caused fragmentations in graffiti writers’ ideological perspectives, while referring to Hebdidge’s definition of subcultural commodification. Lachmann’s idea of the different stages in the graffiti career is however somewhat deterministic, for he devalues the taggers’ artistic merits, and implies that unless they drop out or develop their artistic skills to a level of muralist, they will fall into gang membership.

Comparing graffiti writing as an alternative to gang membership is also discussed in the book by Castleman (1982) and includes graffiti writers’ transcriptions on their relations to violent street gangs. It appears that many of the early graffiti writers were also gang members and that the large number of territorial gangs in 1970s New York is likely to have had an influence on the formation of the early graffiti subculture, as also elsewhere noted (Austin 2001, 63 – 64; Stewart [1978]2009, 31 – 34). This is a historic context situated in New York, however, the associations between deviant gangs and graffiti writers has been repeatedly used as an argument for zero tolerance, stating graffiti writing as a gateway to serious crime, in countries where there is only marginal gang activity (Austin 2001; Høigård 2007; Kimwall 2014; Koskela 2009).

One of the most detailed and analytically multifaceted descriptions of the ‘war’ against the graffiti in NYC during 1970s and 1980s comes from Joe Austin’s book, *Taking the Train* (2001). In contribution to previous graffiti studies, Austin provides a historical analysis of NYC’s socio-economic development and draws intellectual links between the rise of the graffiti writing youth subculture and the city’s political administrators’ attempts to fight subway graffiti through a vast of different campaigns. He points out that graffiti as an urban youth culture emerged in the vibrant post-war period, when the political radicalism of youth in the 1960s was active, and youth unemployment in the 1970s increased in particular amongst ethnic groups. He also notes the influence of modern popular culture and the increasingly commercialized public sphere that literally invited urban youth to create a ‘self’ to exist in the otherwise anonymous cityscape. Graffiti writing became a revolutionary

means for many urban and poor youth to produce their own prestige economy on their own cultural terms. As Austin (2001, 52) states:

“...writers transformed and resituated the “American” work ethic into a new context, directing its productivity toward the more autonomously managed cultural realm of writing practice. The emerging writing culture institutionalized values of hard work, creativity, persistence, autonomy, and skill in ways that few educational and occupational avenues open to young people ever had.”

Important for the study at hand, Austin (2001, 249 – 266) also describes the growth of the graffiti subculture’s own magnificent documentation which he argues is a consequence of its *control*, specifically as a reaction against the ‘buff’ - the removal of graffiti in public space. The subculture’s own rich visual documentation in the form of DIY-magazines and videos is a great example of creative subcultural resistance and represents a creative solution to the sanitization of graffiti in the city space. Moreover, Austin points out that, due to this evolution, the subculture is no longer isolated to a distinct street, on a specific train line or a district in the outskirts of a city but is shared and consumed through mediated channels globally. Therefore, graffiti is not only a powerful tool for constructing subcultural identities locally, but likewise is, an important tool for learning geography globally; hence, a means for exercising spatial mobility among urban youth (Austin 2001, 261).

Jeff Ferrell (1996) notes the role of subcultural theories in his ethnographic book *Crimes of Style* while presenting an anarchist criminological explanatory model for graffiti writers’ resistance against control authorities in the city of Denver. He advocates anarchist criminologists’ to dismantle the logics of authoritarian aesthetic in public space, which “constitute a sense of beauty grounded not only in control of property and space, but in the carefully coordinated control of image and design, in the smoothed-out textures of clean environments” (Ferrell 1996, 180). Ferrell’s analysis is important for an understanding of the meanings of governmental control and its criminalizing effects on graffiti writers’ subculture. He is one of the only graffiti scholars who also describes his own involvement in the subculture while offering a close-eyed description of graffiti writers’ experience with controlling authorities. Ferrell notes how public and official responses to graffiti changed from regarding it as a harmless act to a clampdown on graffiti under the influence of moral entrepreneurs and the Denver Anti-Graffiti Campaign in 1989. Graffiti is imagined in local media reporting as a form of social decay in hyperbolic terms which links

graffiti with crimes including rape (Ferrell 1996, 141-142). But graffiti writers construct their own meanings of a hard-hitting control system, which provides them with an adrenaline rush, while as an aesthetic crime graffiti ultimately stands as “a stylish counterpunch to the belly of authority” (Ferrell 1996, 197).

Gregory Snyder’s (2009) *Graffiti Lives!* turns to a post-subcultural perspective on graffiti writers’ career opportunities which transforms youthful exploits into adult careers. His three major chapter titles neatly depict this transition: “Getting in”, “Getting up” and finally “Getting out”. As part of his methodology, Snyder invites graffiti writers to scrawl in his ‘black book’ – a sketchpad which writers keep to elaborate and to design their graffiti pieces – and thus expands his own journey into the New York graffiti subculture over a decade. Snyder’s work resists many of earlier generalizations about graffiti. He argues, for example, that graffiti includes people from all classes and ethnic backgrounds. Snyder also challenges the perspective on graffiti that deploys it as a form of resistance. He believes graffiti is more of an apolitical leisure, in which the main goal is to simply get your name up and play the fame game. Graffiti thus exists in all neighborhoods, rich or poor, but especially in those districts that attract the young and tourists, as the graffiti there is likely to be seen by a wider audience. Finally, the book reflects on the different career opportunities some of the graffiti writers have taken as a result of their artistic skills, such as tattooing or the media business. Snyder’s work is ethnographically rich and brings the reader into adventurous events in the graffiti world, but it is limited in providing more critical reflections on social and economic consequences many writers face when writing illegally.

2.2.3 Gender in previous graffiti subculture research

The early scholarly accounts identified writers as predominantly male, though noting that a number of girls and women participated in the graffiti subculture since its origins (Castleman 1982, 68; Lachmann 1988, 235; Stewart 2009, 49). The pioneering studies mention important female writers like *Barbara 62*, *Eva 62* and *Stoney*, however, the subcultures’ male-dominance is far from problematized, and the role of women tends to be downplayed merely as the side-kick of their male associates. Jack Stewart’s PhD study *Subway Graffiti: An Aesthetic Study of Graffiti on the Subway system of New York, 1970 – 1978*, reprinted as the book *Graffiti Kings* (Stewart 2009) includes a brief section titled “The First Girl Writers” and introduces it with (ibid 49):

“In the beginning, graffiti appeared to outsiders to be a guy thing. Joe 182, a *traditional writer* and one of the early Kings, ushered in an important innovation when *he* turned Barbara 62 and Eva 62 on to graffiti.”⁴

The few accounts referencing girls’ involvement are narrated primarily from a male informant’s point of view, that often internalize the male writers’ power to take in or exclude female writers from social groupings (also e.g. Castleman 1982, 68 – 69). However, if female writers get credited by their male peers, it is often found in the pursuit of applying to masculine codes (Macdonald 2002; Pabón-Colón 2018). A founder of the Ex-Vandals crew formed in early 1970s Brooklyn, *Wicked Gary* recalls in Castleman’s (1982, 100) book:

“We had a bunch of girls in our group...about twenty or twenty-five. They used to use boys’ names when they wrote. Daring Danny was a girl named Denise. Bad Bobby was a girl named Robin. Long Lightnin’ Larry was a girl named Lynn. Mighty Mike was a girl named Michelle. They were like sisters, cousins, friends who lived in the neighborhood and they were writers too, so we got them involved and they became Ex-Vandals.”

Since graffiti is written under a pseudonym, the tag-name is often for outsiders set as the only clue for imagining a graffiti writers’ social identity and thus the ways of being seen on the walls is likely to be built on the assumption of a gendered subject (Hannerz 2017; Pabón-Colón 2016). Though Castleman did not reflect the quote above further, graffiti seems to enable creative ways of transgressing fixed gender representations and has done so since its origins. In regard to gender assumptions, Stewart (2009, 214 – 215) present lists of ‘girl tag names’ that likely belonged to pioneering female writers, but also lists of girl tag names that he proposes were written by their boyfriends and states (ibid 49):

“There were always girls’ names on the walls, because guys often wrote their girlfriends’ names as tributes to them. Some of the guys tried to discourage their girlfriends from writing, because they were afraid they would get hurt or arrested. So they tagged their girlfriends’ names on their own pieces or wrote only their girlfriends’ names. This made it difficult to determine who was writing what.”

⁴ My emphasis.

Also Lachmann's (1988, 235) presents his male interviewees' opinion on girlfriends' inability to paint on subways, due to a lack of physical and mental strength: "Women get scared and can't keep up". The author concludes that male sexism against women is integral to the writers' "bravura conception of graffiti writing" (ibid). Castleman (1982, 69) states that women appear to avoid the train yards by choice, however, notes that female writers, such as *Stoney* was also socially excluded from the predominantly male graffiti writers' organization *United Graffiti Artists* (UGA) (ibid 121).

The early literature also mentions a decline of well-known female writers in late 1970s (e.g. Castleman 1982, 69). Austin (2001, 59 – 60) proposes that the decline of an earlier larger number of young women writers was marked by the subculture's turn towards subway graffiti that inherently formed it as a more competitive 'cat and mouse' game between writers, police and transit authorities. While earlier practices of graffiti writing on walls at stations or inside trains was an activity that could be done by day and after school, trespassing in train yards shifted the prime writing time to nights - a time that was difficult to access as leisure time for daughters in demanding households (Austin 2001, 60).

Jeff Ferrell (1996, 36) briefly notes the subculture's male dominance, and in a few sentences describes some of his informants' girlfriends' contributions to the field. Also, in his ethnographic introductory story he describes "J", a female participant who often followed them out to act as a photographer and to 'look out' for the male graffiti writers (Ferrell 1996, 22). Gregory Snyder (2009, 4 – 5) makes a short effort to acknowledge female writers and the many different problems they face in a male-dominated subculture. But while stating that graffiti is not a gendered form of expression, he argues that illegal graffiti still turns off many women, who "choose to concentrate their efforts on legal walls". He concludes that female writers are given respect "if they indeed 'gotten up' and are 'all-city'.

Graffiti subculture has, in two prominent Anglo-American studies, been more analytically connected to subcultural masculine identity constructions (Macdonald 2002, Colón-Pabón 2018). One of the most influential works concerning gender in this field is Nancy Macdonald's book, *The graffiti subculture – Youth, Masculinity and Identity in London and New York* (2002). Whereas post-subcultural theories have focused on more individualized perspectives on identity constructions, Macdonald (2002, 32 – 48) in particular builds her theoretical framework on a critique on the class-oriented subcultural theory and brings the structure of gender into the

forefront of her analysis of graffiti writers' identity constructions. She explores how graffiti writers – predominantly young men – use graffiti as a tool to construct masculinity through subcultural accounts. Macdonald describes the wide range of qualities of graffiti writing that are attributed to a deviant masculine identity. To “get up” and make one’s tag name visible, one has to exert qualities of daring, confidence and adventurousness to encompass trespassing into train yards and escaping from the police (Macdonald 2002, 42).

By “getting up” Macdonald (2002), like many other graffiti scholars, conceptualizes graffiti as a subcultural career where one “climbs up the career ladder as any individual who wants success” (Macdonald 2002, 67). This presents graffiti as a highly competitive subculture where graffiti writers fight for respect, not only amongst other writers, but also against the controlling authorities – which generates a dramaturgical model of the war between and amongst men in the urban milieu (Macdonald 2002, 108). She concludes that men in the graffiti subculture write to improve their masculinity, while women work hard to not be feminized by the subculture. While most of Macdonald’s informants were young men, she included three female participants from a total of 29 graffiti writers in her study. Macdonald describes the ways that these women became excluded in the subculture through strategies which patronized them, and which focused on their sexual reputation. She argues that women in the graffiti subculture are primarily marginalized due to their inherent threat to a masculine discourse (Macdonald 2002, 143).

Jessica Pabón-Colón (2018) recently published the book *Graff Grrlz - Performing feminism in a hip hop diaspora*, which is probably the largest study of women’s graffiti writing in terms of its empirical material. She has interviewed 100 graffiti writing women living in 23 countries, partly through ‘netnography’ and partly in face-to-face meetings and ethnographic observations for more than a decade, across national borders. Pabón-Colón (2018, 8) claims that ‘graff grrlz’ are not absent from graffiti studies because there are none, but rather because their contribution to the subculture has not been valued as important due to a conventional male lens (Pabón-Colón 2018, 8).

Pabón-Colón (2018, 43) criticizes Macdonald’s analysis of gender politics as failing to recognize that individuals performing ‘daring’ and ‘dangerous’ masculinity are not always interested in constructing a (hetero)masculinity in order to ‘become’ men. She states that graffiti interested scholars should engage in advancing alternative and progressive gender ideologies that resist racism and challenge binary

understandings of gender. As a new conceptualization for doing gender in graffiti, Colón-Pabón offers the term ‘feminist masculinity’ - a gender performance characterized by the utilization of recognizably masculine traits, such as aggression, ownership of public space and braggadocio, however for feminist means, such as community building, self-empowerment and peer support (2018, 46 – 47).

The women Colón-Pabón presents are prolific and well-known writers in the graffiti world, who have over the years worked hard to ‘get up’, and hence ‘earned’ their place in graffiti history. While Colón-Pabón (2018, 61) explicitly criticizes neoliberal conceptions of girlhood and its seemingly liberating ‘girl power’ - movement (e.g. McRobbie 2009), her analysis of graff grrlz’ performing a feminist masculinity nevertheless presents an uncomplicated story about the ability to get up in the subculture, if you just work hard enough despite being a girl, colored and poor. She writes that feminist masculinity “demands that graff grrlz show off, strut their stuff, puff out their chests, and make their selves big enough to get up and get over” (2018, 69). She does not problematize this stance, or ask if the amount of work is the same for all girls, or if it is possible to get up in the subculture without accepting the normative character of a daring and aggressive masculine identity. The work enshrines masculine valorization as a part of a desirable female identity in this subculture without critically asking why. Nevertheless, Pabón-Colón’s most important contribution to the research field is her methodology of netnography that demonstrate the exciting and empowering effects of social media in enabling women graffiti writers, who often feel isolated within their local scenes, to establish feminist collectives across nation borders.

Another ethnographically and criminologically impressive academic work on graffiti subculture is written by Norwegian criminologist Cecilie Høigård. Her long-standing ethnography investigates the effects of Oslo’s zero tolerance policies against graffiti and its constitution of a criminal underclass of graffiti writers. In her book *Gategallerier* (2007) she introduces the concept of ‘graffiti masculinity’, which is similar to Macdonald’s work on graffiti’s masculine identity. Høigård’s graffiti masculinity is built on the ideas of protest and deviant masculinities developed by Connell (1995) and Messerschmidt (1993) which describes the subversive identity constructions that may be undertaken when other resources to accomplish gender are non-accessible. What distinguishes graffiti masculinity from a conventional protest masculinity is the lack of physical violence used to gain respect within its community (Høigård 2007, 388). Rather, graffiti uses aesthetic and visual practices

as means for constructing respect. Also, Høigård (2007, 370) notes that graffiti masculinity is constructed especially through homophobic accounts and a marginalization of women in the field.

Another theme that has recently been discussed amongst feminist-oriented graffiti scholars, is the distinction between graffiti and street art and their relationship to the binarity of gender (Macdonald 2016; Pabón-Colón 2016; 2018, 70; Publication II). Both scholars and documentarians have noted that more women tend to participate in street art than graffiti (e.g., Ganz 2006). In a book article, Macdonald (2016) suggests that the rise of street art as a phenomenon has, in contrast to the predominantly male graffiti subculture, offered a more diversified subcultural form of self-representation that has benefited marginalized women. However, Colón-Pabón (2018, 70) complicates the ‘masculine graffiti’ and ‘feminine street art’ discourse, by claiming that this exacerbates female participants’ minority status by femininizing their desires and artistic potential within the subculture. She claims that the ‘hard’ of graffiti is what attracts women to write graffiti and argues that women do not want the subcultural boundaries to be ‘softened’ (ibid 71 – 72). Either way, graffiti and street art have certainly faced different types of institutional control, which tend to frame street art as a ‘softer’ form of illegal activity than graffiti, that is by controlling authorities understood as more appropriate for female participants (Publication II).

Grffiti subculture has, despite the rise of an international graffiti women’s scene (Pabón-Colón 2018), been substantially male-dominated throughout its historical and local developments (Høigård 2007; Lähteenmaa 1991; Macdonald 2002). Among the very few academic studies of the graffiti subculture in Finland, a PhD-study by Piritta Malinen (2011, 95 – 97) also observes the male dominance in the subculture, while including only interviews with boys. Likewise, a survey study on legal graffiti in Helsinki concludes that 95% (n = 184) of graffiti writers were male (Helin 2014, 77). My own experiences of the field confirm this male dominance, both in Finland as well as in other countries where I have visited and established social networks with graffiti writers. I agree with Pabón-Colón’s point on that there is a difference in how history is written and the ways that someone becomes worth mentioning and being interviewed for a subcultural research project. This is in line with what feminist approaches to subcultural theory have long argued for; that the invisibility of women and girls in subcultures is partly a result of researchers not looking in right places

and not recognizing the particular subcultural styles and spaces cultivated by people other than cis-men (e.g., McRobbie & Garber 1978).

3 GRAFFITI AND NORDIC ZERO TOLERANCE

Previously in this thesis, I have described the history of graffiti and the rise of a male-dominated youth subculture that has its roots in what became known as subway graffiti or spraycan art in North-American cities. When it comes to the ‘grand narrative’ of Helsinki graffiti, a substantial part of its history is recognized in a similar struggle to those of North-American cities (Austin 2001; Ferrell 1996), however, embodied in the project “Stop töhrylle” between 1998 – 2008. Nevertheless, much of the project’s control discourses against graffiti was not simply a replication of the North-American style to control graffiti, but a specific alignment constituted in a Nordic zero tolerance framework.

Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Iceland, commonly referred as the Nordic countries, are known for their welfare models branded by a strong state organization, egalitarian social benefits, free education for its citizens, high level of institutional trust, gender equality and economic wealth, to mention but a few general characteristics. While these countries share historically many socio-political perspectives, they also stake similar understanding to crime prevention, criminal justice, juvenile crime, and policing methods in the public space (Høigård 2011; Lappi-Seppälä 2011; Lappi-Seppälä & Tonry 2011). This likewise applies to the case of graffiti.

There is a congruent control history for graffiti writing in particular in the cities of Helsinki, Stockholm and Oslo, but also partly within Copenhagen. These Nordic capitals have shared analogous developments for combatting and domesticating graffiti between the 1980s and the present day (Arnold 2019; Helin 2014; Høigård 2007; Kimwall 2012; 2013; 2014, 105 – 149; Koskela 2009, 271 – 298). The most distinguishable period in Nordic graffiti policy could be named as the *zero tolerance period* between the mid-1990s and the mid-2010s, a time when Helsinki, Stockholm, Oslo, and for a short period also Copenhagen, applied specific anti-graffiti campaigns.

Thus, in this section I will begin by noting the origins of zero tolerance and the often interrelated ‘broken window’ thesis. I will then continue to contextualize the

Nordic zero tolerance against graffiti, and in a next subsection, describe the Helsinki-case and the Stop töhrylle project. Finally, I will conclude the chapter with a discussion on the Finnish concept for deviant graffiti; 'töhry'.

3.1.1 Zero tolerance and broken windows

Zero tolerance is a criminological policy approach frequently related to the 'broken window' thesis, which assumes a strong causal connection between petty crimes and social decay in a spatial location (Bratton 1998; Høigård 2011, 310; Kelling & Coles 1997; Korander 2014; Wilson & Kelling 1982). The broken window thesis was presented in an article by James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling (1982), "Broken Windows. The Police and Neighbourhood safety" in *The Atlantic Monthly*. The authors simply stated that if a broken window is not fixed, graffiti not removed, litter and begging not prevented, the area where these disorders – so-called 'quality-of-life' offenses – occur degenerates when solid citizens move out and crime rates become more severe. Though the causality between minor incivilities and serious crime was little reflected and despite of representing a rather journalistic contribution, this article has become one of the most influential contributions to neo-conservative criminological debates on crime prevention, police enforcement and zero tolerance policy in public space (Korander 2014, 26).

'Zero tolerance' and 'broken windows' are though not two of a kind, nor are they functioning as two separate ideas (Korander 2014; 26 – 30). Zero tolerance is often linked to the set of policing methods adopted by the New York Police Department (NYPD) in the 1990s and the dubious 'miraculous' crime drop under the influence of mayor Giuliani, who was indeed inspired by the influential broken windows - article (Korander 2014; Newburn & Jones 2007; Young 1999). In a Nordic frame, zero tolerance is often understood as an imported Anglo-American approach to crime and spokespersons for zero tolerance often denote the 'New York miracle' (Høigård 2011, 306; Korander 2014). However, while the New York model was operating as an overarching campaign for the police to react to all forms of deviancy in the public realm, in general the Nordic approach to zero tolerance differs. It is usually presented as part of a rhetorical claim in local campaigns that tackle single issues such as; school bullying (Honkatukia & Vesikansa 2018; Høigård 2011, 311), youths' public alcohol drinking (Korander & Törrönen 2005) and indeed graffiti (Kimwall 2012; Koskela 2009). In the UK, zero tolerance as a political rhetoric is

perhaps best associated to the late 1990s New Labour party and the ‘Anti-Social Behaviour Act’ (Newburn & Jones 2007; Young 2011, 125). The term zero tolerance is also linked to a less discussed narrative of policing methods, yet an important one to mention, and that is the feminist advocacy of campaigns for zero tolerance of violence against women in late 1980s Canada and early 1990s UK (Newburn & Jones 2007; Young 1999, 137).

It is likely, that zero tolerance as a phrase first appeared as a political buzz word on the US war on drugs under the Reagan administration, and became only later associated with the policing methods referring to the above mentioned quality-of-life offenses and NYPD’s policing methods in public space (Newburn & Jones 2007). The above mentioned article by Wilson and Kelling (1982) does not mention the term zero tolerance, neither is the concept introduced in a later book by one of the same authors; *Fixing Broken Windows – Restoring Order and Reducing Crime in Our Communities* (Kelling & Coles 1997). The book does, however, discuss the combat of graffiti in New York subway and the so-called ‘Clean Car Program’ in 1984 as one of the core cases when policing quality-of-life offenses in public space. Moreover, police commissioner William Bratton – the initiator of the debated policing methods by NYPD – denied ever implementing zero tolerance policy because “the phrase smacks of over-zealousness – a real danger when communicating expectations about policing” (Bratton 1998, 43), though very confusingly is also one of the chief contributors in the book *Zero Tolerance: Policing a Free Society* (Dennis 1998). The definition of zero tolerance policing in the “Editor’s introduction” does not really differ from the broken window -ethos; “Prevent a broken-down and ugly environment of neglect becoming a breeding ground for crime and disorder” (Dennis 1998, 3).

In a genealogy of the zero tolerance term, Tim Newburn and Trevor Jones (2007, 238) concludes that despite of the denied links to broken windows -thesis, the influential narrative that took hold in New York became a primary stake for promoting zero tolerance policy across the globe, and therefore it is difficult to separate these two conceptualizations. Zero tolerance is hence perhaps best understood as a *dramaturgical device* to influence an acceptance of prevention methods that works like a ‘New York miracle’ (Newburn & Jones 2007, 238). However, zero tolerance as a symbolic narrative does not come into full effect without so-called ‘policy windows’ (Newburn & Jones 2007), the newsworthiness and claim-making agencies that “make their living from convincing government and public that they

have a ready solution to the crime problem” (Young 1999, 129). In this aspect, zero tolerance is strongly linked to *ideological* features that includes a distribution of a moral agenda, a vision of ‘appearances’. As such, zero tolerance could be described as a cosmetic criminology, for it aims to discipline the public aesthetic by keeping it ‘clean’ from visible disorder, rather than by investing in social welfare (Young 2011, 191). In his study on graffiti as an urban crisis in New York, Austin (2001, 146) goes as far as claiming the approach *postmodern* “in its emphatic attention to the surface appearance of social order” and its resonates on “the public square as a text, like a newspaper”.

3.1.2 Nordic zero tolerance against graffiti

Whilst zero tolerance policy has both been practiced and defined in a vast of different ways, it is suggested that zero tolerance should be defined accordingly to a specific context (Korander 2014, 27). In a book chapter named *Scandinavian Zero Tolerance on Graffiti* by Kimwall (2013), four cornerstones for Nordic zero tolerance are defined: removal, legislation, prohibition, and propaganda (see also Kimwall 2014). A principle statement, which these cornerstones are founded on, is that all graffiti, legal or illegal, is a gateway to more severe criminality, and thus must be fought by all essential means. These four cornerstones are important for describing how Nordic zero tolerance against graffiti operated in practice. My further proposal is that Nordic zero tolerance against graffiti can be recognized as a synergic influence between the countries operating in synch on two parallel, but separate policy levels. One relates to a trans-Nordic policy level and a second to a local municipal level.

The local level is here depicted as series of several anti-graffiti campaigns operated by the municipalities and transportation authorities, often in cooperation with specific police units and private security companies specialized in graffiti prevention, but also through a general moral panic against graffiti framed in local mass-media reporting (Brunila et. al. 2011; Høigård 2007; Kimwall 2014). This history begins in late 1980s, when public entities such as transportation authorities and spokespersons for the municipalities in Helsinki, Oslo, Stockholm, and Copenhagen all launched their first campaigns against graffiti vandalism (Høigård 2007, 114, 163; Koskela 2009, 287; Kimwall 2012, 65). The first anti-graffiti campaigns in these different Nordic cities were quite modest in their approach and short-lived, nor did they strictly promote a zero-tolerance or total prohibition of graffiti in public space.

Graffiti was at this point still often framed as ‘art’ when painted in ‘right’ conditions – such as at open walls or in graffiti schools, and could be described as a domestication approach to graffiti. Kimwall (2014, 111) defines it as a form of repressive tolerance, which tolerates graffiti to some extent, and considers that the best way to deal with illegal graffiti is to support its legal forms. Such methods usually involve youth work and engage not only city institutions, but also transportation authorities in socializing graffiti writers.

The more severe attempts against graffiti were yet to come in what could be identified as the second wave of Nordic anti-graffiti campaigns, launched from the mid 1990s onward. Kimwall (2013, 109) describes the birth of the Nordic zero tolerance against graffiti as a period starting from 1994 when the Transit Authority in Stockholm launched the ‘Operation Safety’ campaign. A large proportion of the campaign’s focus was to combat graffiti through a public debate in a section provided by the local Metro-news, a free of charge and daily paper handed out to passengers on public transportation. Also in 1994, the municipality in Oslo introduced an aggressive anti-graffiti campaign with large billboards presenting the ‘tagger-head’ of a young boy visualized as brain dead – a head with empty brains, except for the small metal ball found inside spray-cans (Arnold 2019, 149; Høigård 2007, 124). This billboard was supplemented with information-letters on the costs on graffiti removal that were sent to 11 000 households in Oslo. Moreover, a reconstructed ‘tag-bus’ – fully covered with tags was driven around in the city-center, while a commercial pre-screening film named ‘Game over’, illustrating violent tagger youth, was shown in film theaters. In the next few years, police control over graffiti was increased by establishing a specialized police unit for combatting graffiti in Oslo and open walls provided by schools and leisure associations were banned by the municipality (Høigård 2007, 173, 175 – 176).

In many aspects, the Nordic approach to zero tolerance increased its rhetorical intensity by the end of 1990s and early 2000s. It was, for example, not until 2000 that the concept zero tolerance was explicitly declared by the Oslo municipality as an official method to combat graffiti (Høigård 2007, 173). Kimwall (2013) portrays the ‘golden years’ of zero tolerance in Stockholm as a period from 1997 – 2002, when the acceptance of zero tolerance in public debate increased. Also, in 1998, the Helsinki municipality started the Stop töhrylle project, and in 2000, the Copenhagen municipality started a cooperation between the transportation authority DSB and the

local police department to fight graffiti through a zero tolerance strategy (Høigård 2007, 166).

A Nordic approach to zero tolerance proclaimed graffiti prohibition in all forms, which concerned not only the legal forms of graffiti in the public realm, but also extended to cultural institutions such as graffiti exhibitions in museums and galleries. As a result of the vast campaigns, legal walls and graffiti writers' own unofficial galleries were locked down, commissioned graffiti murals were buffed, and graffiti related art exhibitions were closed due to the zero tolerance policy in many of the Nordic cities (Høigård 2007, 166; Kimwall 2012, 81; Koskela 2009, 290 – 291). Exhibitions presenting graffiti at least in Helsinki, Stockholm and Oslo were publicly criticized by spokespersons from municipal units and transportation companies (Høigård 2007, 178; Kimwall 2012, 81; Koskela 2009).

The legislation combatting graffiti was similarly toughened up in 2003 both in Finland and Sweden by increased rights to police to stop and search graffiti writers for spray cans (Kimwall 2014, 123; Koskela 2009, 248; see also Chapter 5). In early 2000, police departments in Helsinki, Stockholm and Oslo also established expert graffiti units. Moreover, in early 2000 the private security companies specialized in graffiti prevention, such as the Swedish Falck Security, Commuter Security Group, and the Finnish Protection Service, became crucial for operating the combat against graffiti writers' activity in the cities of Stockholm and Helsinki (Kimwall 2014; Koskela 2009).

Besides these campaigns and institutional crime control efforts on a local level, a string of trans-Nordic conferences on graffiti vandalism were organized between 1998 and 2012. These served as an expert platform for exchanging ideas on graffiti prevention between the countries. Moreover, these conferences strived to establish a coherent Nordic zero tolerance strategy against graffiti. The first *Nordic conference on graffiti vandalism*⁵, was organized in 1998 by the Stockholm municipality and transportation company SL. The 200 representatives were mainly spokespersons from the Nordic capitals, different police departments, public transportation companies and private security companies. However, two of the keynote speakers were sent all the way from New York City; Steve Mona, the head of the Transit Division Vandal Squad at the NYPD, and Mike Lombardi, the head of New York City Transit (MTA) at the time. Their presentations discussed their own experiences

⁵ "Nordisk konferens om klotter. Sammanfattning.", 15. – 16.10.1998 in Stockholm (ed. Väisänen 1998).

of fighting graffiti and promoted zero tolerance as the only solution for preventing graffiti crime, as it presents a 'risk' for youth. The summary report of the conference celebrated the important cooperation between the Nordic countries and the established working group on graffiti prevention (Väisänen 1998).

Over the next decade, transnational anti-graffiti conferences were organized in several Nordic capitals⁶. These conferences were organized in cooperation with different municipalities and the active stakeholders on anti-graffiti policies, such as the leaders of the local anti-graffiti campaigns, members of specific police units, private security companies specialized in graffiti vandalism, and lobbyists from public transportation authorities. There was no public organization presenting this network, rather it was generated by the synergies these different stakeholders found in their shared approach to graffiti. Over time, representatives from non-Nordic countries also became involved in these nearly yearly meetings. For example, in 2004 Tallinn municipality organized an anti-graffiti conference with delegates including spokespersons from the Finnish campaign Stop töhryille, and an anti-graffiti conference organized in Helsinki 2005 included participants from thirteen countries⁷. In 2012, the last known Nordic anti-graffiti conference was held in Copenhagen. That this was the final conference appeared due to a general decline in the support of zero tolerance politics in the cities of Copenhagen, Oslo, and Helsinki⁸. Two years later, in 2014, Stockholm became the last capital to resign its zero-tolerance strategy⁹.

When it comes to graffiti, the establishment of a common Nordic strategy is perhaps not remarkable if the close socio-political relationship between the countries is considered, yet this is a surprising turn when considering the countries' shared welfare agenda that generally works on principles of social integration. On the other hand, recent perspectives have acknowledged that a backlash in the Nordic welfare model occurred in the aftermath of the early 1990s recession, which had a significant

⁶ While these conferences were rarely publicly announced, it can be verified that after the first conference in Stockholm 1998, Nordic anti-graffiti conferences were at least held in Oslo 2003, Helsinki 2004, Helsinki 2005, Stockholm 2008, Oslo 2011, and in Copenhagen 2012. See also *Fria Tidningen* 5.10.2012: "Nordisk klotterkonferens i toleransens tecken" (<http://www.fria.nu/artikel/95021>, 2.6.2020) and "Stop töhryille -Asukastiedote. HKR-Tekniikka projektityksikkö" - pamflett (2006).

⁷ Stop Töhryille -Asukastiedote. HKR-Tekniikka projektityksikkö. (2006)

⁸ *Fria Tidningen* 5.10.2012: "Nordisk klotterkonferens i toleransens tecken"

⁹ *SVT Nyheter* 14.10.2014: "Stockholm avskaffar nolltolerans mot graffiti" (<https://www.svt.se/kultur/konst/stockholms-graffitiforbud-avskaffas> , 11.3.2021).

effect on the perspectives of public space and youth. In particular, the juvenile delinquency in the public debates of Finland in the 1990s described youth and children's norm violations in terms of individualized risk and demanded early interventions and risk evaluations (Harrikari 2008).

Cultural geographer Heli Koskela (2009) has described the shift in the Finnish urban realm from mid 1990s as a period of 'fear', which emphasized rationalistic approaches towards crime prevention. Koskela writes that adolescents in public space were more regulated than ever, and defines youth in this period as a criminalized generation. A rising neoliberal trend, accompanied with the ascendance of popular right-wing parties influencing the discourses on criminal justice and crime prevention, have in particular emphasized a neo-conservative criminology through local partnerships and municipal led strategies (Høigård 2011, 332; Korander 2014; Koskela 2009, 263 – 264). This kind of criminological discourse supports situational crime prevention (see Hayward 2007), immediate solutions, and quick responses in campaign forms, all of which the vast array of different anti-graffiti campaigns in the different Nordic capitals exemplifies.

Nordic zero tolerance on graffiti could finally be summarized as a distinct criminalization period, lasting from the late 1990s until the early 2010s. In line with the zero tolerance policy and broken windows ethos, graffiti was argued to be a gateway to criminality, which should be prevented by all means. Thus, the criminalization did not only cover illegal graffiti writing, but graffiti as an aesthetic and cultural form during the distinct period.

3.1.3 Helsinki graffiti and the anti-graffiti project "Stop töhryille"

The early history of Helsinki graffiti is described in a few works (Brunila et. al. 2011; Helin 2014; Isomursu & Jääskeläinen 1998), and in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, I will bring up further some of its overlooked issues regarding control and gender. The Chapters will also cover subcultural reactions to, and the fall of zero tolerance in Helsinki. Therefore, in this subsection I will only briefly point out some of the specific events that occurred early in the public realm, and that shows the development of policy trends on graffiti. It is, as well an introduction to the municipal-led project Stop töhryille that has indeed starkly symbolized the criminalization narrative of Helsinki graffiti.

Apart from two short-termed anti-graffiti campaigns, the most common way to handle graffiti in the city between the late 1980s and the mid-1990s can be described as a period of domestication, that is fighting ‘illegal’ graffiti with ‘legal’ graffiti. *Mika Helin’s* (2014) study provides an excellent description of the city’s early engagement in legal graffiti. For example, the youth center in Katajanokka was among the first city institutions to ‘legalize graffiti’, as a local newspaper stated in 1986 (Helin 2014, 32). Another incident from 1988 illustrates the Helsinki City Transportation’s positive approach to graffiti, when an illegal mural painted by the *The Diamonds Crew* on a wall next to the metro station at Kulosaari was turned into a legal piece. The crew was interrupted in their nightly activity and escapes, but the manager of the transportation authority declared in a public announcement that the group of graffiti writers could return to complete their piece on the wall (Helin 2014, 30; Isomursu & Jääskeläinen 1998).

In 1987, the major of Helsinki Raimo Ilaskivi launched the first anti-graffiti campaign *Nuija -kampanja* (“The Gavel Campaign”), which promised 500 FIM for anyone who would report a graffiti writer (Helin 2014, 41). This short-lived campaign was withdrawn within few months after public critique (Koskela 2009, 286). Another less noted anti-graffiti campaign named as *Stadi siistiksi* (“The City Goes Clean”) was launched by the municipal Public Works Department in 1990, though operated only for two weeks. This campaign took the youth as its main target and a hymn composed specifically for the campaign by *Jussi & The Boys* was played out in the speakers in schools, which encouraged in cleaning up the city¹⁰.

Two legal graffiti murals in Helsinki are important to note as well. These murals are widely considered as the most impressive legal works in the city’s graffiti history before the shift into the zero tolerance period, and they would later turn into symbolic arenas for the graffiti war in Helsinki. In 1991, a 300 meter long wall located between the highways at the Kulosaari metro station was painted in a co-operation with a group of 18 graffiti writers and the youth center in East-Helsinki and funded by the Department for Urban Planning (Helin 2014, 33). The second significant mural was located in the tunnel of the Malminkartano train station. It was commissioned in 1995 by the Department of Urban Planning. Both walls of the

¹⁰ HS 18.10.1990: ”Stadi siistiksi -kampanja koettaa herättää vastuuntuntoa” [The City goes clean – campaign tries to wake up the responsibility] (<https://www.hs.fi/kaupunki/art-2000003019962.html>, 24.6.2020).

concrete tunnel, each 400 meters in length, were painted by 40 graffiti writers in co-operation with the Department of Youth Division and Helsinki City Transportation (Helin 2014, 34).

Graffiti had by the mid-1990s become incredibly popular among youths in Helsinki, and several authors have recognized this time period as a major shift in the Finnish public debate on graffiti (Brunila, et. al. 2011, 15; Helin 2014, 42 – 43; Henriksson 2017; Ihalainen 2017; Koskela 2009, 287; Mäkinen 2010). A research report made by the municipal's Statistics unit in 1997 estimated that between 2500 and 3000, mostly young men, wrote graffiti in the city space (Helin 2014, 31). Helsinki was also at the time said to be the most vandalized capital in Europe (Helin 2014, 43). It is also in 1997, when the first big court case was held against a group of nineteen graffiti writers at the Vantaa District Court. Thirteen young males were given a conditional sentence and two an unconditional prison sentence. Together they were sentenced to pay one million Finnish marks for the caused damages to the Finnish train company VR (Brunila et.al. 2011, 15). While the newspapers actively reported on the increasing vandalism in the city, graffiti was now no longer understood as a youthful approach to beautify the city. It was also at this point that the public debate was informed by the notion of deviant graffiti through the concept of *töhrä*, although the concept was in the city's policy language systematically used for illegal graffiti since 1989 (Helin 2014, 41). In parallel, the belief in that legal graffiti could reduce illegal graffiti shifted, and which marked a discursive change from a domestication approach towards a zero tolerance strategy.

In 1997 a pledge by a member of the Centre Party at the municipal council suggested for a project for resolving the problem of increasing vandalism. It was accepted, and on the 1st January 1998, the Stop *töhrä* project was launched (Helin 2014, 41). Finland was also at the time nominated for the presidency of the council of the European Union in 1999 and Helsinki was selected as the Cultural Capital for Europe in 2000. These tasks of representation were often used at the municipal council as a justification for tidying up the cityscape and for funding the project (Helin 2014, 43). The project was situated under the supervision of Public Works Department, but its operative praxis at a street level was carried out by the private security company Finnish Protection Service (FPS). During the first years of the project, twenty patrolling pairs of FPS guards were funded by the municipal. Their task was to reduce graffiti vandalism in the city space by direct surveillance, graffiti

documentation, and the reporting of graffiti vandalism to the police (Brunila et. al. 2011, 68).

The project adopted a criminology ‘broken windows’ and the rhetoric of zero tolerance. As a rhetorical strategy, the project refused to recognize graffiti as an art form and distinguished only one kind of graffiti – *töbry* (Koskela 2009, 287 – 299). The first head of the project, Mikko Virkamäki later stated that it was crucial to reduce the ‘mixed messages’ about graffiti in order to increase public support for zero tolerance politics (Brunila et. al. 2011, 19). This meant that any account on graffiti that would support legal forms of graffiti was to be torn down. In 2000, the large mural at Kulosaari was thus whitewashed at a higher price than the cost of the initial painting, and similarly in 2004 the mural at Malminkartano train station was covered over (Koskela 2009, 291).

As Høigård (2007), Kimwall (2014) and Koskela (2009) have stated, zero tolerance on graffiti is not only about removing graffiti from public space, but also prohibiting it as a cultural form. In 2001, the museum for contemporary art *Kiasma* was publicly criticized by the Department for Urban Planning and the Finnish railway company VR, for organizing a public graffiti event as part of the URB-festival (Brunila et. al. 2011, 41 – 45; Helin 2014, 35; Koskela 2009, 290). The major Finnish newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat* (HS) cited the VR’s head for security and wrote that there was an essential causality between public graffiti events and the number of vandalized trains¹¹. In the same article, *Akateeminen kirjakauppa* – the biggest bookstore in Finland – was criticized for selling books and magazines with graffiti related content. In *Mikael Brunila, Kukka Ranta and Eetu Viren’s* (2011, 45) journalistic book on the Stop töhrylle project, two of the curators at the museum Kiasma, Virve Sutinen and Mikael Aaltonen, recalls that this public episode resulted in a meeting with spokespersons for Public Works Department, VR and the police, who also confiscated the museum’s graffiti related documents (Brunila et. al. 2011, 44 – 45). Both curators stated that there was an obvious pressure sent from ‘above’ for censoring graffiti, but that the worst threats were made anonymously. Sutinen recalls the episode:

“At that point I got scared when someone found my home address. Someone wrote me awful letters, and signed them as the slaughterer, like he would kill me. I also got

¹¹ HS 6.8.2001: ”Spraymaalarit töhrivät kymmenen VR:n junaa viikon aikana” (Spray painters vandalize ten trains in a week).

shit sent home in an envelope with a message ‘here you have some contemporary art’.”¹²

It is evident that the project received substantial critique both from subcultural members and allies, as well from critical media outlets, and from some of the leftist members of the municipal council. From 2004, a chain of subcultural acts of resistance occurred on a street level, that I suggest are a significant part of the dramaturgical drop of zero tolerance in Helsinki. This subcultural resistance, and what it has to do with a ‘masculinization’ of the subculture, will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5. To conclude, the project came to an end on the 31st December, 2008. In total the project had costs for 23.5 million euros. Half of the budget came directly from the municipality, while the second half was financed by VR and by private finance, such as property owners (Helin 2014, 45 – 46).

3.1.4 Graffiti as art and *töhr* – A Nordic polemic

At the beginning of Chapter 2, I applied Kimwall’s perception of graffiti as a discursive formation that is produced both in and beyond its distinct subculture, and in relation to other institutions that have the power to engage in the definition of graffiti (Kimwall 2014, 10, 12 – 13). While graffiti has become a phenomenon that is negotiated, transformed and discussed both in the subcultural frame as well in the larger frames of society, this often tends to embody graffiti within a dualism that perceives it either as crime or as art (Kimwall 2014, 7). In the Finnish language, the word ‘*töhr*’ is significant for this discursive formation. While the word *töhr* has already been mentioned, it will be here defined as one side of the art-crime discourse of graffiti, that rhetorically frames graffiti as deviant, ugly and criminal.

Because of its specific undertones, the word *töhr* is difficult to translate to English. Yet, a somewhat tentative explanation would describe *töhr* as a substantive, that signals a public scribbling, or graffiti that is illegal, badly made and vandalistic in its intent. Respectively, the agent noun *töhrijä* signals a perpetrator of this bad and ugly graffiti, in opposition to, for example the concept of a graffiti artist or a street artist. It is also important to note that *töhr* cannot simply be translated to the medium of ‘tags’, which are often perceived to be uglier or more vandalistic than, for example,

¹² My translation.

a multicolored and complex graffiti piece. Instead, *töbry* is used in media reports and in law enforcement for all kinds of graffiti that is illegal, despite its possible artistic ‘worth’.

Many previous Finnish graffiti studies state that the term *töbry* is a fairly new term, which was not acknowledged in dictionaries before it became recognized as a concept directly connoting illegal graffiti in the 1990s (Brunila, et. al. 2011; Helin 2014, 41 – 46; Koskela 2009, 280 – 296; Malinen 2013, 185). However, the word *töbry* can also be related to an older Finnish word - *töberryys*, that, like *töbry*, in vernacular language relates to dirt and smudges, but also to misunderstood art and public scribbles, such as childish drawings. Finland’s National Library keeps an online archive of old newspapers and journals from prior to 1967. If you type in the Finnish word for ‘wall’ (*seinä*) and *töberryys* the database returns 458 matches (with the word *töbry*, the same equation gives only one result). The first twenty ‘best matches’, all published between 1900 – 1930, yield several articles that discuss poorly understood art as *töberryys*, such as the youth art movement’s Neo-expressionism¹³, badly written poems¹⁴, but also ugly billboards¹⁵. On the other hand, there are also some clear connotations to urban graffiti writings on railroads as early as in 1917:

“When you travel on railroads especially in the third class and you see disgusting *töberryys* on the walls of the lavatories and hear the ‘cigarette talks’, with amazement you notice the low spiritual level among the male youth even at present civilized times.”¹⁶

Also, another earlier article published in 1904 in the Finnish newspaper *Otava* ponders on the meanings of vandalistic scribbles in public space¹⁷. This article likewise raise an early concern about *töberryys* in public space; the defacement of park benches, walls, and the like. The writer notes an expansion of *töberryys* in public space that “seems to be a native tendency among our folk”. Interestingly, this author believes that these scribbles are accomplished by the civilized and the lettered, for the handwriting of these *töberryys* are of a skilled quality which “a stiff hand of a working man in a factory is unable to [accomplish]”. While still perceiving this

¹³ Aitta, 01.10.1926.

¹⁴ Punainen viesti: Sosiaalidemokraattinen julkaisu, 01.01.1907.

¹⁵ Liikeapulainen: Suomen liikeapulaisliiton äänenkannattaja, 01.04.1915.

¹⁶ Uusi-aika, 30.04.1917, ”Raakuuden ilmiöitä nykyaikaiselämässä” (English translation by M.F.)

¹⁷ *Otava*, 09.06.1904, ”Pakinoita.”

phenomenon as a disgrace for the nation, the writer suggests that specific “*töberry* books” (*töherryskirjoja*) should be provided in public space as a solution for “these men and women who can’t stop this problematic symptom”. What the author seems to describe, albeit in a highly pathological tone, is a pioneering version of urban graffiti writing cultivated and enjoyed by young people in Finnish urban space.

In the aftermath of the Stop *töhyille* project, *töbry* has become a word that is used to articulate the wrong kind of graffiti, both in subcultural and in institutional terms (Malinen 2010). For example, the instructions for the legal graffiti walls in Helsinki use the word *töbry* when prohibiting graffiti writing in places other than the legal wall¹⁸. It should also be noted that some of my informants distinguished between *töbry* and graffiti, and perceived *töbry* mostly as something distinct from subcultural graffiti, such as children’s chalk graffiti or lavatory graffiti - forms of expression that, in their opinion, do not relate to graffiti as a distinct youth subculture.

Another related discourse that is often offered both in news articles and in scholarly contributions presents graffiti as aesthetically superior, sophisticated, and more beautiful in legal forms. In some cases, ‘good’ legal graffiti has become a new way to fight ‘bad’ *töbry*, when, for example, housing companies and other public constructions invite well-known graffiti writers and street artists to paint large murals on surfaces that would otherwise attract taggers and graffiti bombers. Such is the case in the Pasila Street Art district mentioned in the Prologue. These murals are often approached as a sophisticated form of graffiti as they are the product of better planning of the art piece, access to more resources (more spray-cans and more colors) and are a more time-consuming activity (no need to pay attention to patrolling surveillance). Cultural geographer Hille Koskela’s (2009, 290) critique of Helsinki-based zero tolerance describes how illegal graffiti results in ‘bad’ graffiti, as graffiti painters do not have time to paint aesthetically more appealing paintings, or to care about the quality of their work, as they are aware of graffiti’s ephemerality. We should however be careful in making such arguments when criticizing zero tolerance, for this tends to legitimate the art-crime discourse by framing an administrative approach as having the right to define what is artistically better, and what constitutes an appropriate (legal) graffiti piece. Asserting that legality will result in aesthetically superior graffiti is problematic, as it assumes it ‘better’, whilst not necessary appreciating subcultural views.

¹⁸ <http://supafly.munstadi.fi/maalauspaikat/maalauspaikkojen-ohjeet/>

A tandem case important to note, especially in the mutual Nordic zero tolerance against graffiti, is the Swedish words *klotter* (the substantive) and *klottrare* (the agent noun) that became increasingly used in the Swedish ‘nolltolerans’ against graffiti (Kimwall 2014, 105 – 140; Thor 2019, 31 – 33). Like the word *töbry*, *klotter* appears to articulate graffiti as a sign of degeneration, deviance and bad graffiti in the Swedish debate on the graffiti art-crime dualism (Johnson 2004; Kimwall 2014; Thor 2019). While Kimwall (2014, 108) concludes the words *klotter* and *klottrare* have several local connotations that makes them difficult to convert to English, he pragmatically translates them to ‘graffiti vandalism’ and ‘graffiti vandal’.

I will use the same translation for the word *töbry* (graffiti vandalism) and *töbrija* (graffiti vandal) in the following chapters. However, in cases where it is crucial to stress the Finnish connotation, I will cite the word *töbry*. Moreover, I will keep the Finnish name for the anti-graffiti project Stop töhrylle untranslated, as previously noted. In a PhD -thesis on graffiti and street art in Stockholm, Tindra Thor (2019, 31 – 32) also keeps the Swedish word *klotter* untranslated to emphasize the significance of a locally produced discourse, and claims the *klotter*-graffiti dichotomy as a peculiar Swedish dilemma framed in relation to debates on zero tolerance politics in Stockholm. However, as a Nordic phenomenon with similar graffiti politics, *töbry* and *klotter* have shared polemics both in zero tolerance and in post-zero tolerance politics, and that interestingly have each presented a definition of graffiti that promotes aesthetic unworthiness, both in subcultural and institutional perspectives.

I also find it noteworthy that despite the ethnographic field in Helsinki containing predominantly a Finnish speaking population, many of the local graffiti writers knew the word *klottrare* and its problematic connotation for Swedish graffiti. The word *klottrare* has perhaps been popularized amongst Finnish graffiti writers by a book named *Dom kallar oss klottrare* (They call us vandals) that presents some of Swedish graffiti writers (Jacobson 2000). I also heard the expression “dom kallar oss klottrare” ironically phrased amongst Finnish graffiti writers, which could be interpreted as a subcultural gesture towards their cross-national experience of anti-graffiti politics. I would thus underline that *klotter* and *töbry* are both part of a Nordic zero tolerance discourse in a global graffiti narrative that is historically embedded in the ‘war’ on graffiti displayed between graffiti writers and city authorities replicating the New York-model.

4 CULTURAL CRIMINOLOGY, CONTROL, AND GENDER

In this chapter, I will finally conceptualize *control* and *gender*, and ground my research in cultural criminology and feminist philosophy. While cultural criminology and feminist philosophy are the primary focus of this chapter, I first wish to make a brief comment on the relevance of subcultural theory for this thesis.

Much of the contemporary debate on subcultural theory is concerned with the definition of what a subculture is. In many aspects, this debate has been conducted between the different paradigms of subcultural theory; the Chicago School, the Birmingham School and the CCCS, and the post-subcultural perspective (Becker 1963; Blackman 2014; Hall & Jefferson 1977; Hannerz 2016; Hebdidge 1979; Griffin 2011; McRobbie 1991; Muggleton 2000; Thornton 1997; Thrasher 1927; Williams 2011). This theoretical field, in its broad and opposing reflections, has displayed a dispute between class-analytic and individualistic approaches to subcultural life and style (Blackman 2005; Shildrick et. al. 2009; Tolonen 2013). Critical arguments against the CCCS's interpretations of youth cultures, as a semiotic way of resolving social contradictions in class differences, have referred to the lack of empirical data, the neglect of girls' subcultures and the weak focus on structures of ethnicity, hence taking white, working-class and males as the departure point for theorizing 'resistant' subcultures (Tolonen 2013, 57). Post-subcultural perspectives argued that youth cultures were better understood as "examples of the way that media and consumerism gave rise to new, reflexive forms of cultural identity based around affective associations grounded in taste, aesthetics, and lifestyle" (Bennett 2015, 45). However, such perspective tends to bypass the meaning of placing youth subcultures within the political context of state control, hence ignoring youth as a subordinated social class predicted upon generational conflicts, but also in terms of material conditions dividing youth themselves (Blackman 2014, 506). This is in particularly relevant for when assessing youths' control experience in public space, when they appropriate 'territory' and "win spaces for the young: cultural spaces in

neighborhoods and institutions, real time for leisure and recreation, actual room on the streets or street corner.” (Clarke et. al. 1977, 45).

Now, my primary concern is not so much with theorizing what a subculture is, but rather how subcultural experience is constructed through dynamics that make the structures of gender and control relevant for subcultural performing. Graffiti writing is foremost a youth subculture, that is characterized by a capacity to bend and question forms of control in urban space. Thus, it comprises an act of resistance that challenges some hegemonic rules about how city space should be used, by whom, and by which bodies. Graffiti writing is also a transnational subculture, that shares a distinct narrative, characterized by the ‘war’ against graffiti embodied in a vast of zero tolerance campaigns and other policy efforts aiming for graffiti removal in public space. Writers moreover share many values, practices, and performances across the globe. The creation of one’s tag-name, and the constitution of an anonymous and disembodied ‘graffiti self’ is perhaps the most distinct practice regardless of country or city. However, as a *male-dominated subculture*, picturing the person behind the tag tends to be built on notions of the able male body which is further stabilized by the subculture’s valorization of hetero-masculine traits, such as risk taking, competitiveness, physical strength, the devaluation of feminine characteristics and homophobia (Hannerz 2017; Høigård 2007; Macdonald 2002; Pabón-Colón 2018). Regardless of these subcultural ‘norms’, writers create their urban selves always from their structural positions in the context of the space they occupy. Therefore, major structural axes, those of gender, class, ethnicity and age, but also the material and political conditions of the city matter for how graffiti writers’ agency is formed in each graffiti subculture. Now, in the context of Helsinki, it is relevant to assume that the specific graffiti politics, namely zero tolerance, have indeed reinforced some masculine characteristics, such as risk-taking and deviant behaviour, but also emphasized the disembodiment of graffiti writing, resulting in more hidden gender performings.

I will ground my research in cultural criminology and feminist philosophy for following reasons. In cultural criminology, (sub)cultures are of interest for their creative capacity to resist, carnivalize and transgress social control, which often suppress the people not finding themselves in ordinary life courses (Presdee 2004). ‘Crime’ or ‘deviancy’ is thus ‘cultural’, and the product of the social order lived at any particular historical moment (Presdee 2004, 276). That is how “human beings create cultural solutions to their life problems in social structures” (Young 2011,

222). Cultural criminology moreover pays attention to phenomenological understandings of crime and brings the role of emotions related to criminal activities into the complex interplay of a 'symbolic environment' (Ferrell et al. 2008). Cultural criminology emerged as a theoretical paradigm in the mid-1990s under the influence of the 'cultural turn' presented in Jack Katz's (1988) *The Seductions of Crime*, and is closely related to 'mainstream critical criminology', subcultural and labeling theory (Young 2011, 205, 222). These theoretical strands are social constructionist in their orientation, emphasizing that deviance is a constructed category, and defined by those in power in a certain context (Young 2011). Cultural criminology is concerned in the everyday meanings of crime control and culture, and is often described as a paradigmatic shift in critical criminologies, usually referring to Marxist, anarchist and feminist approaches (Ferrell & Sanders 1995; Hayward 2004; Presdee 2000; Young 2011). In its early stages, cultural criminology was underpinned by the theoretical influences of symbolic interactionism and subcultural theory, and thus was often focused on the criminalization processes of subcultures (Ferrell 1996; Hayward 2008; Presdee 2000). This strong interest in meanings, and the symbolism and aesthetics of deviant and subcultural representations has also resonated strongly with cultural and media studies (Ferrell & Sanders 1995; Hayward 2015, 3; Young 1990). Importantly for this study, cultural criminology also acknowledges the importance of spatial dynamics in studies of deviancy and accords a certain relevance to cultural geography, and 'the city' (Hayward 2004; 2012).

Cultural criminology, hence, offers a fascinating theoretical framework for a research subject such as graffiti, as it largely concerns questions of subcultural space in the city, and the control of it in contemporary capitalist societies, without reducing the creativity of human culture and emotional energy (Ferrell 1996; Hayward 2004; Presdee 2000; Young 2011). However, as graffiti research has confirmed the male-dominance of the subculture, and because the urban space has often been reserved for 'men' and is moreover replete with signs for 'masculinity' (Young 1990; Wilson 1991), there is a necessity for a feminist approach in order to understand this subcultural experience.

Cultural criminology has been criticized for its gender blindness (Naegler & Salman 2016). Gender has clearly been overlooked until recent years, though some early accounts, such as works by Alison Young (1990; 1996) provide some exceptions. Some cultural criminologists thus argue that a feminist influence been an important epistemological anchor for the field since in its early manifestations

(Ferrell & Sanders 1995), and especially through its insights on a reflexive ethnographic methodology (Ferrell & Hamm 1998; Hayward 2015, 10). Keith Hayward (2015, 16) for example claims that feminist theories and cultural criminology have experienced a mutual development informed by a diverse array of research projects that have proceeded from an explicitly feminist perspective. Naegler and Salman (2016, 356), however, state that studies in this field still tend to combine ‘crime’ and ‘culture’ in a manner that is preoccupied with ‘prototypically masculine, high-risk pursuits’. This renders a male normativism, whilst failing to recognize the complexity of gender as one of the primary areas of cultural influence in our everyday lives.

After this introduction to the theoretical framework, I will now turn to the two main theoretical concepts of the present study: *control* and *gender*. What is control for cultural criminology? And, how is gender understood within cultural criminology? Influential works in the cultural criminological field, such as *Cultural Criminology and the Carnival of Crime* (Presdee 2000) and *City Limits* (Hayward 2004) merely implicitly define the concept of control. Nevertheless, it seems that control is ever present, and thereby constantly establishing a vague disciplinary power influencing culture – at least in a ‘dynamic’ sense. Nor is gender much of a concern except for the few critical approaches described above, and for some other recent publications (Alkemade 2014; Gailey 2009; Lois 2005; O’Neill 2010; Rajah 2007; Seal 2013). It is these two concepts and their common relation within the framework of a cultural criminology that I now wish to reflect on. I will begin with control, and first trace a link between the term ‘social control’ and cultural criminology.

4.1 Critical visions of control

I am interested in the concept of *control* and the ways that it reflects a complex system of social and cultural divisions, and in how it shapes power and constructs social performance in our everyday lives. I understand control primarily as a response to behavior, that are constructed as deviant, problematic or undesirable in some way or another. This response appears as crime control, punishments, moral panics, social exclusion, treatment, and social work (Cohen 1985, 1). However, I also believe control is ‘dynamic’, and thus as a response to ‘wrong’ behavior, it also generates a

‘response to response’. The response to control is what makes human being creative and cultural (Ferrell 1999).

The term control is ambiguous in the many sociological and criminological disciplines. Nevertheless, social scientists tend to talk about control as a social construction, thus often referred to as ‘social control’ (Cohen 1985, 2). This does not make it much clearer. As Stanley Cohen (1985, 2) puts it in his book *Visions of Social Control*:

“In sociology textbooks, it [social control] appears as a neutral term to cover all social processes to induce conformity ranging from infant socialization through to public execution. In radical theory and rhetoric, it has become a negative term to cover not just the obviously coercive apparatus of the state, but also the putative hidden element in all state-sponsored social policy, whether called health, education or welfare. Historians and political scientists restrict the concept to the repression of political opposition, while sociologists, psychologists and anthropologists invariably talk in broader and non-political terms. In everyday language, that concept has no resonant or clear meaning at all.”

The concept of social control in the discipline of sociology has a long history, and the origins can be traced back to European classical philosophical thoughts on the nature of the State by Thomas Hobbes (2011) and Jan-Jacques Rousseau (2003), followed by the works of Emile Durkheim (1947), and Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1978), and with a North American sociology on ‘social systems’, both in functionalist and interactionalist strands (Chriss 2019; Mead 1925; Merton 1938; Ross 1969). Social control is then broadly related to the organization and patterns of institutionalization, in other words the ‘social order’ that maintains cohesion in the society. Social control is also connected to the regulations of norms and socialization, and is allied with the constitution of power and authority, both informally in small social settings, as well in more highly formalized settings on the large-scale level of societies (Cohen 1985; Deflem 2019; Heidensohn 1996). As a general concept, social control is affiliated with what we think is ‘normal’ to think, to say and do. Sociologists then often identify between *formal* (law, regulation, governmental action) and *informal* (beliefs, norms, values, traditions, social interactions) means of social control (Deflem 2019; Heidensohn 1996; Honkatukia & Keskinen 2017).

We may also recognize a manifold of usages of the concept of social control in a range of very different and conflicting criminological works, which has resulted into a further unclear meaning of the concept (for reviews, see e.g. Chunn & Gavigan

1988; Cohen 1985; Deflem 2019). However, critical criminology has sought to define social control within a critique against positivist criminologies, and instead of using it as a functional variable in crime-causal settings, critical criminology primarily studies social control as response of economic and cultural inequalities in capitalist societies (Deflem 2019, 2; Cohen 1985; Taylor, Walton & Young 1975; Young 2011). Above all, critical criminology has challenged rigid definitions of deviancy and crime that operate by a logic of 'self-fulfilling' control and criminalization processes (Cohen 1985, 167), that is "imposed with a varying degrees of success upon those in lower structural positions through a social control apparatus ranging from mass media to the criminal justice system" (Young 2011, 202).

Critical criminologist Stanley Cohen (1985) developed his vision of social control under the influence of Michel Foucault's (1977) ideas of disciplinary power and punishment in modern societies. Cohen's interest is focused on the transition and overlapping mechanisms between the formal and informal construction of a control system. While analyzing reforms in punishment systems, from closed prisons to new forms of penalty, such as half-way houses, probation, and community services, Cohen provides a dystopian scenario of the 'net widening' systems of social control. Cohen (1985, 194) describes the ways that this 'net widening' control system operates through logics of professionalism and classification by seeking new forms of deviancy; the criminals and the poor are separated from each other, criminals are pathologized as mad and/or bad, and the poor moralized as deserving or undeserving of social benefits. While closed systems perform the roughest form of control in filtering out the 'hard' end represented by dangerous cases, community programs and therapy work at the opposite 'soft' end to represent cases considered to be not as hopeless. Social control is shaped by the crime control system that expands from formal control into novel sites within society, and consequently increases its influence by penetrating into new informal positions of social life and producing new deviant categories, such as 'youth at risk', 'ADHD kids' and students of the 'special schools'.

In a similar approach, Gilles Deleuze explores the emerging subtle control technologies which were a result of moving from a disciplinary state into a late modern 'rhizomatic' controlling society (Oksanen 2006, 52 - 57). When control operates through rhizomes, it is not only in schools, at work, in the army and the prisons, but 'everywhere'. These perspectives of a visionary criminology pointed out the emergence of meanings for control in more narrowly and informally structured

settings, and became the start of critical surveillance studies (Deflem 1992; Garland 2001; Koskela 2004). This approach has sought to relate social control to the cultural changes of late modernity and linked the concept to wider social changes in labor, increasing technological solutions, and knowledge production for regulation and exclusions in public space.

The term social control appears, as well, in some of the early works in cultural criminology (Ferrell & Websdale 1999; Manning 1999), however it is rather loosely defined, and as such it exists as a vague reference to rationalising practices on a societal level (Hayward 2004, 7) or as the agencies and institutions of crime control that operate as cultural enterprises (Ferrell 1999, 408). In a critique, Martin O'Brien (2005, 610) argues that without a "commitment to theorizing the role of specific institutions in the process of social control", such as the state, or social relations, such as gender and class, cultural criminology is in risk of romanticizing its research subject, while giving less emphasis on structural realism. The 'net widening' scenario of social control, however, appeared in one of the early introductory articles on cultural criminology; Ferrell (1999) uses the concept of social control as an agent for the criminalization processes of subcultures, and claims that the common thread that connects cultural criminology is the presence of power relations and the emergence of a "complex web of social control" at the intersection of crime and culture (Ferrell 1999, 408). The notion of a complex web of social control is related to the power of media in late modernity and its ability to construct representations of crime, which according to Ferrell (1999, 409) tend to legitimate political agendas regarding crime control. Moreover, the complexity of social control and its constitution as a complex web is not only connected to symbolic representations of power, but also to the information age and its mediated enforcement; subcultures launched by alternative forms of art, music and entertainment are also audiences for mass media and therefore also recontextualize, remake, and reverse mass media representations by incorporating them into subcultural meaning-making (Ferrell 1999). Thus, Ferrell (1999) states that cultural criminologists should investigate emerging forms of social control, such as in the mediated form, and the many forms of subcultures that resist these.

Cultural criminology has a tradition in critical criminologies, and thereby a reference point to the critique of social control (Ferrell & Hayward 2014). However, given the many different meanings of social control, and the scanty usage of the concept in cultural criminology, I will hereafter primarily refer to the term *control*.

4.2 Cultural visions of control

To further explore how control is understood in cultural criminology, let us begin with briefly noting what culture is, and then observing the importance of the city for the cultural criminology's perspective of human culture and control. Culture is indeed a complex term, and only generally it may be referred to the way people live, produce art works, create language, form knowledge and performs socially in a time and place, including certain factual and social circumstances (Bauman 1999; Williams 1995). The sociology of culture often classifies between two distinct positions of culture; the idealist and materialist (Williams 1995, 12). As a materialist, culture is understood as the routinization and regularity of the society, derived from the material conditions of a 'social order' (Bauman 1999; Williams 1995, 12; Young 2011, 87). On the other hand, culture is seen as the free roaming spirit of human being, approaching transgressions of social rules as a possibility for creativity and invention (Bauman 1999; Young 2011, 87).

For cultural criminology, culture is clearly not a functional entity generating a social order through regularities and patterns, although it is certainly not independent from material conditions, and thus from power, inequalities and difference (Presdee 2004; Young 2011, 85). Culture is thus not an object, but a praxis, and therefore to be understood as a verb that casts human actions as active in their performances (Young 2011, 87). Hence, culture should be perceived as a dynamic characterization of its time, which in late modernity is demonstrated by an increasing proximity between a plethora of different cultural worlds, values, and beliefs in a narrowed space (Young 1999). In cultural criminology, that space is often regarded as 'the city' (Hayward 2004; Young 2011, 106 – 107). Culture is, of course, not fixed in the city, but travels through it and takes influences from dwellers travelling in and through other cities while returning or moving to new cities. In this way, cities constantly build on their narratives, branding, and the taste they represent as they compete for their existence in the mediated world economy as a worthy city (Georgiou 2013).

People in different cities struggle for a sense of cultural worthiness and for their existence within available divisions of resources. Much of this cultural struggle is casted upon features of consumer culture and a social pressure to create an urban 'self', from a myriad of different social and local positions (Hayward 2004a, 12) Thus, new forms of classes are constantly created in the city – some are controlled to the

symbol of the 'underclass' (Høigård 2007), and some represent the wrong kind of bodies, be it either in terms of skin color, body size, or a gender expression not fitting into a female-male binarity (Halberstam 2005). Youth, as a specific class often become a primary target for control agencies in city spaces, for they regularly represent a novelty to present culture and therefore a dangerous difference and morally ambiguous to the adult world (Austin 2001; Koskela 2009; Presdee 2000; Shildrick, et. al. 2009). The specialized task forces of the police department, zero tolerance campaigns, and security companies specialized in juvenile vandalism generate the stigmatization of specific art forms, such as graffiti, which are related to groups of youth who are constructed as public folk devils and met with moral indignation (Ferrell 1996). The discourses offered by zero tolerance campaigns in particular, often describes autonomous creativity and youth activities in gang-related terms (Koskela 2009; Young 2011, 203).

Cultural criminology seems to tackle control – or social control – simultaneously from multiple angles, which indeed points out to the complexity of the concept even more. The concept varies in use in situ - from a range of formal legislation to minor sanctions in narrow social relationships. Ferrell (2013, 257) states that cultural criminology engages in situational, subcultural, and mediated constructions of meaning around issues of crime and crime control. As 'control' aims to socialize the individual in society in a manner that often serves the interest of those who have the power to define what should be controlled, and how things should be organized, it influences both the macro and agency level of acting. The control apparatus is defined as formal on a macro-level in the criminal justice system, in the conventional rules of society, in high-level youth policy, and in institutions such as the education system, the labor market, the army, health care, the prison system, and the gendered norms that shape our everyday life. Thus, control is associated with the politics of meaning and the dynamics of social and cultural settings, in interventions on both an agency level and in the structures of our everyday lives (Ferrell 2013).

The way control on an agency and on a micro level is understood in a cultural criminological approach stems from the field's symbolic interactionist background. People construct meaningfulness in their everyday lives and in their personal relationships with other people in an ongoing basis. In every subculture, in prisons, in schools, and in kindergartens people form meaningful encounters and find emotions of trust, hope, rage, excitement, joy and even love in the most hopeless situations. Chris Jenks (2005, 57) for example, writes on the significance of

interactionism in subcultural theory: “The interactionists’ perspective seeks an understanding of the basis of social organization in people’s obvious and perceived capacity to manage and control their own circumstances.” This is not to ignore institutional power and control operating on a macro level, it is rather to demonstrate that individuals exercise and receive control by the ways in which they assess a situation and are able to define that situation (Jenks 2005, 57). In some respects, control is here counterproductive, as the actor generates his or her own possibilities by reproducing cultural meaning, and creating or challenging the social conditions of control in interaction with other people (Jenks 2004, 57).

One of the most interesting analyses of control on youth in contemporary transgressive cultures is made by Mike Presdee (2000) in his book *Cultural Criminology and the Carnival of Crime*. Like the many other cultural criminologists, Presdee explicitly uses the concept of ‘control’, while ‘social control’ is mentioned only once in the book (Presdee 2000, 109). In the book, control is often synonymous with oppressive policies on youth pleasures and their activities on the streets in terms of alternative arts, music and bodily acts. By the influence of Michael Bakhtin’s (1984) analysis on carnivalism, control is described as an oppressive world of order that forces human beings to seek a ‘second life’, where irrationality can thrive and where transgressive pleasures can be found. But provocatively, Presdee draws a line between oppressive control and internalized self-control on our bodily functions:

I did wrong right from the beginning. There at the start, when rules are first brought to bear on us, and we start to learn about control; who the controllers are and what’s being controlled. The first lesson was in how to control ourselves; how to control our bodily functions; how to use a potty and when; bringing together both a sense of time and place – just after meals – last thing at night – once a day. (Presdee 2000, 12; 1988)

The way Presdee describes control through his autobiographical note ensures that cultural criminology maintains a focus on control in everyday life as an embodied experience. That is, control as something that appears to be internalized in our bodily performances. Control is then not only a process operating by means of a controversial apparatus or a populist media discourse, but that it is also embodied to distinguish what is ‘pathological’ and deviant by regulating our own bodily acts in relation to others.

Taking the perspectives presented above into account, cultural criminology mainly refers to control as the cultural and everyday regulation of deviance, but also

as a way to frame the meaningfulness in the resistance and transgressions expressed by subjects that become controlled. My underlying interest in control is here, how, in its oppressive and counterproductive complexity, it may become meaningful within a subculture. This relates to the very basic sociological problem formulation of the social act constructed between agency and social structure, and moreover to the ways in which subcultures are created as solutions to jointly experienced social problems (Blackman 2014; Young 2011). It is further related to an underlying inquiry of how control interacts with subcultures in our bodily acts, and how this intersects with gendered performances in controlled environments, such as the city space.

4.3 Gender as a performative in cultural criminology

Feminist philosophy has long recognized the gender order, that is the binary of the feminine and masculine produced by the symbolic hetero-patriarchal order, as part of the structures that control cultural and sexual expressions in everyday life. This symbolic order is historically created in the subordination of women's bodies, signaled as the 'Other' sex different from men (de Beauvoir 1953; Butler 2002). Judith Butler (2002) offers a complex psychoanalytic critique of the compulsory heterosexuality and proposes gender as a performative concept in her book *Gender Trouble*. For Butler, gender as a performativity depicts the ways that bodily acts are committed to repeat the attributes and symbols of femininity and masculinity, which socially structure cultural readings of gender. Over time, differently repeated gestures and acts of desire may challenge the hegemonic domains of a masculine male body and a feminine female body, thus mocking fixed notions of gender. Gender is thereby not an original category grounded in a biological dichotomy as a male and a female body, but rather a series of significations attributed to femininity/masculinity inscribed *on the surface* of the body (Butler 2002, 173).

In this thesis, gender will be approached through the notion of performativity, but in a way that resists a rigid embodiment of the performance, and thus challenges its anchoring in the visible appearance of bodies. For Butler (2002, 179), the capacity for gender difference and the transgression of heteronormative assumptions require a "mundane social audience" to be spectators for different repetitions of gender, such as for example the cultural practices of drag. But in graffiti, and particularly for forms of graffiti that are prohibited, written secretly during nights, and hidden from

the gaze of control, the performative body is not directly available for the mundane audience to observe. Rather, it appears masked, as a ghost that hides its identity behind a pseudonym. These hidden bodies leave only residual signs – the pseudonym, a tag, a graffiti or other piece of signs left behind to be seen by those who represent the ‘mundane audience’. Graffiti is thus a disembodied practice and conceals a particular dilemma for recognizing the different bodies participating in this subculture. As Erik Hannerz (2017) has observed, graffiti – especially in a zero-tolerance context – is disembodied, yet often invokes imaginations of an able male body. The normative notions of the body in graffiti are not only gendered but racialized, hence the ability for the invisible body to move and act freely, and to pass control and risks in public space, rests on being able to conceal one’s criminal identity (Hannerz 2017, 375). That is often privileged to white, middle-class, and adult male bodies.

In critical approaches to criminology, a number of scholars have contributed to a gendered approach to deviancy in order to understand the significance of feminine and masculine constructions of the sexually deviant body and the rule breaker in domains of crime (Heidensohn 1996; Messerschmidt 1993; Walklate 1995; Young 1990; 1996). These critical perspectives have articulated how access to power renders hegemonic aesthetics over the gendered body in criminal events, such as those illustrated in criminal justice, media, subcultures or by popular framings. In the *imagination* of the crime, as Alison Young (1996, 1) states, the body is structured according to a binary logic of repression, such as in the oppositional terms man/woman, white/black, young/old, mind/body, rational/irrational, and I would include rich/poor. These dichotomies are constructed within a value system which makes one visible and the other invisible. Young argues that gender is only marked in criminology when femininity is questioned, that is when it as a ‘phantasm’ seeks a masculine desire. As Young (1996, 27) writes: “The question of femininity has, in many ways, been criminology’s best-kept secret. Its mark has always been (one of) masculinity. That is, in the unmarked surface of the offending body is found the masculinity of criminology.”

Young (1996) echoes a psychoanalytic approach and a linguistic turn in her criminological reading of gender. If men by ‘nature’ are prone to violence and criminal acts, women as offenders already exist as deviants before being marked as a crime maker; they are already the different Other in the symbolic order of patriarchy (Young 1996, 27). The ‘phallic economy’ that constructs the masculine

order as bona fide is signified in the language of the 'Phallus', which is the 'being' of femininity but which the masculine position is 'having' (Butler 2002, 56). The withdrawal of Phallus would break the foundational illusions of the masculine subject. Femininity is thus marked as a paradox in criminology; it is both prohibited but essential for the construction of masculinity (Young 1996, 28). As such, female offending may be pathologized as 'hysteria', as an unstable borderline for masculine desire, and in particular in framings of popular culture, as the narcissist that abandons her role as a self-sacrificing altruist and neglects her commitment to deconstruct the masculine ego (Dijkstra 1986; Young 1996, 31). Femininity is thus an enigma that is controlled in the criminology's 'closet' in order to express the dominance of masculinity (Young 1996, 43).

But there are strategies for liberating the feminist adventure in criminology, and some of them can be recognized in accordance with Young's (1996, 27) description of a femininity which "oozes from the cracks in the smooth surface of discursive masculinity and manifests itself". Like Butler, a great deal of feminist authors (Chowanec, Phillips & Rytönen 2008; Irigaray 1985; Riviere 1929) have investigated the strategies of the *masquerade* to elaborate on the ontological meanings of gender and sexuality. The notion of the masquerade is complex and multidimensional, but if taken as a concept that functions as a disruption in the smooth appearance of fictitious 'authenticity', it may present a productive way of reading graffiti and its subordinated gender positions. As I have stated above, graffiti appears as a mask for hidden identities, and as such it has already an analogical synergy with the concept of masquerade and gender difference. Luce Irigaray (1985, 133) states for example that the masquerade offers women the possibility of participating in man's desire, but that it also transforms a form of aggression; a suppressed feminine desire which would establish an insubordinate alterity to the masculine subject if dismantled, thus exposing the failure of masculinity (Butler 2002, 67; Riviere 1929). In other words, understanding graffiti as a masquerade and its subordinated subject as a masked body hidden from its audience may offer a novel stance for unsettling fixed constructions of the gendered subculture, which in reality is more messy, diverse and uncertain than the 'control' of it may at first glance suggest.

One of the strongest feminist critiques of cultural criminology is articulated by Laura Naegler and Sara Salman (2016) in their article *Cultural Criminology and Gender Consciousness: Moving Feminist Theory from Margin to Center*. Naegler and Salman (2016,

355 – 356) state that while cultural criminologists seem to understand ‘culture’ as the symbolic expression of emotions intertwined with structures of power, they pay little attention to the patriarchal order and its effect on the experience of emotions and desire related to crime and criminalization processes. They are critical towards cultural criminology’s tendency to overly focus on illicit subcultural activities that endorse ideals for ‘masculine’ activities, and where the emotions of thrill, excitement, pride and self-importance are regarded as the domain of men (Naegler & Salman 2016, 359). In particular, they problematize cultural criminology’s tendency to understanding women in male dominated fields as engaged in a ‘mimicry’ of masculine behavior. Rather than recognizing women’s specific experiences of criminal activities, women are often identified as ‘acting like men’. Naegler and Salman (2016, 362) thus argue that while women do engage in male dominated fields of ‘edgework’, they never do so in same ways as men do.

Conventionally, subcultures on the streets and in urban milieus have been understood to be cultivated by young men who, with their own particular social relations and practices of recognition, have provided resources for performing ‘resistant’ gender styles – at least for men (Brake 1985; Macdonald 2002). Consequently, the cultures of femininity on streets and in public domains is often overlooked (Griffin 1987; McRobbie 1991), and still a scantily researched subject area, although there are important exceptions, such as the drinking ‘ladettes’ (Jackson & Tinkler 2007), punk girls (Leblanc 2002), new wave girls (Blackman 1998), and school-girl culture (Hey 1997). The feminist critique is hence a central question for studies of subcultures that chiefly present signs of masculinity as a dominant force of aesthetic production in urban space. As was discussed in the second chapter of this thesis, many graffiti scholars assert that male dominance is a result of respect-seeking and self-awareness in an urban milieu, while locating the female presence in the subculture as a threat against notions of a masculine identity granted to male bodies (Høigård 2007; Macdonald 2002). These truly important studies on graffiti are abundant in offering forms of street masculinity as the primary solution for a subverted subcultural identity, both for women and men, however, in doing so they also inevitably undermine feminine features as possible ways of belonging to the subculture.

4.4 Gender differences on streets

In this final section, I attempt to work with ideas of gender as a performativity, not necessarily as an approach that is simply understood as a visible repetition of embodied acts, but rather as a way to signify spaces. Thus, I look at how the relation between the body and the urban space¹⁹, can be understood as a site for emerging gender performances.

To begin with, female bodies in relation to space tend to be guided more rigidly than male bodies, thus they are often directed towards the spheres of private spaces, such as the domains of home (Massey 1994). Often, their sexual respectability is ruled by their proximity to emotionally invested spaces, as wives, mothers, daughters and sisters. When it comes to urban space, female figures are prone to sexually deviant representations. Historically, women in the city have been presented as a problem for control, urban planning and for the social order, “because their presence symbolized the promise of sexual adventure” (Wilson 1991, 6). In the city, and in particularly in public spaces such as the streets, women have subtly been characterized as forms of femininity out of control – the whore, the lesbian, the fallen woman, and the temptress (Wilson 1991, 6). Along with deviant images of the prostitute, women with an unguarded desire for autonomy and political activity have even depicted an evil in folklore representations of the witch (Heidensohn 1996, 92, Young 1990). Deviant images of women in public space are still quite scattered. In other words, it is difficult to find popular framings equal to the romantic notions of urban male juvenile delinquency, such as the ‘hooligans’ and other folk heroes who with their life outside their families seek loyalty, trust and solidarity on the streets amongst other youngsters. In this case we may of course note the female bank robber *Bonnie* in 1930s US, however her presence is usually never depicted outside her male companion *Clyde*.

How, then is femininity or women as subordinated subjects able to register their autonomy in urban space, on the streets and in the city? For Elisabeth Wilson (1991), despite its dangers and issues of sexual violence, especially against women, the city presents the possibility to subvert the controlled female figure. The city offers a potential to the carnivalesque and everything that is forbidden and perverse, but

¹⁹ Cultural geographers have for a long time recognized the gendered differences between ‘space’ and ‘place’. For a more complex description of space and place, and their relation to gender, see for example *Space, Place, and Gender* by Doreen Massey (1994).

desired. Wilson admits that city life is indeed masculine, with its phallic symbols of towers, triumphant architecture and over-rationalistic control, but proposes feminine in its enclosing embrace, in its unruly underworld of labyrinths and in the ‘second city’. She states that the dual city is actually built on this “perpetual struggle between rigid, routinised order and pleasurable anarchy, the male-female dichotomy” (Wilson 1991, 7 – 8). Presdee’s does not problematize gender in his cultural criminological texts (2001, 2004), however, his depiction of the ‘second life’ performed on the streets and as the true site for the carnivalesque, illustrates the same drama as Wilson’s vision for urban desire: a fantasy, which may not always go well, but that is a way to live with the burden of the rationality of official everyday life. As Presdee (2004) comments, it is no surprise the youth in every generation continue to defend the streets, for there one’s lived life can be examined in self-awareness and outside of the conventions of stiff and predictable structures, at least for a moment.

Another useful reading for mapping the terrain of urban space as a site for emerging, different and unruly gender performativity may be found in the queer studies of J. Jack Halberstam (1998, 2005, 2018). Halberstam (2005, 126) has in particular traced the different representations of minority masculinities and suggests that a queer reading of them would yield critical insights on the problems of compulsory white hetero-masculinity, and provide us with a deeper understanding of its violence over transgenderism. In *Queer Time and Place – Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, Halberstam (2005) offers a post-structural reading of geography and challenges the body-centered identity to propose a relocation *between* embodiment, place and practice. As Halberstam (2005) notes, heteronormativity leads to a ‘common sense’ reproduction similar to capitalism, an inherited desire for predictability in time, which follow the logics of family schedule, the time for marriage, the routines of child rearing and the accumulation of wealth. Halberstam therefore proposes queer not necessarily as a sexual identity, but as a range of different temporalities and moments, which operate in opposition to the common senses of heteronormativity. Queer is thus rather a ‘way of life’, not simply a ‘way of having sex’, to quote Michael Foucault’s (Roach 2012) eminent statement about homosexuality (Halberstam 2005, 3). For Halberstam, queer is the possibility for alternative relations to time and space, and belonging to subcultural life, which obscures not only the dimensions of gender, but also age. He argues that queer provides a better understanding for reading subcultures’ rebellion against the

hegemonic, for queer radically breaks with the normative assumption of the emergence of an adult life distinguished from the unruly period of adolescence (Halberstam 2005, 152).

Cultural criminology should look to the streets and the urban milieu, as well their mediated fields, as spaces that offer youthful crowds the important moments for challenging the binary logic of gender and the fixed positions of hegemonic masculinity and femininity. Urban subcultures should thus be understood as potential sites for complex gender identities, continually enacted in subcultural gender performances (Leblanc 1999; Halberstam 1998, 2005). As Ross Haenfler (2015, 130) notes, subcultures are sites for gender play and gendered resistance, and as such, they also reveal emerging gender performances.

To conclude this chapter, I will return to the dilemma of graffiti as a form of disembodiment in a controlled space. When graffiti is written anonymously by means of a pseudonym in public space, the acting body behind the graffiti is rarely seen by its audience. The body as a performativity in an illegal act is forced to keep its identity hidden, thus gender identity is rarely manifested publicly without a 'catch' by the net of the control system. Thus, the normative assumption that constructs male-dominance in the graffiti subculture is seldom challenged without a confrontation with control authorities, or via documentation that recognizes gender performances created by other than the masculine male body. The difficulty with graffiti as a disembodied form of expression is therefore essentially constituted by gender-blind archiving practices, and by its histories being written through a male lens that regards the able male body as the normative form within the subculture. This perspective is related to how graffiti becomes imagined not only in research, but also in popular culture, in news articles, by control agencies, and in the subculture's own media production, which becomes crucial for the recognition of subtle gender performances. Here, the methodological gaze for conducting 'subcultural archives' becomes important for recognizing alternative bodies and resistant gender performances in subcultures (Halberstam 2005; Leblanc 2002; Pabón-Colón 2018).

5 URBAN ETHNOGRAPHY AS A METHODOLOGY

I will now turn to discuss the methodological approach of this urban ethnographic work and describe the ways that I have encountered, documented, and explored the Helsinki-based graffiti subculture. In this chapter, I will also introduce the sub-studies of this thesis, *Publications I – IV*, firstly by referring to them as part of my methodological encountering of the field, and then by describing how, in practice, they were accomplished.

In this thesis, I adopt an urban ethnographic methodology. Methodology is often defined as a broader philosophical framework for outlining the ways that research is conducted, how methods are adopted for collecting data and how the nature of the knowledge produced in the process of research is understood (Howell 2013). An ethnographic approach, as an overarching research design, regularly overlaps both disciplinary boundaries and research practices. As such, ethnography is not only a process of ‘observing’ and ‘participating’, but a way to experience and conceptualize a field (Madison 2012). Cultural criminologists often engage in ‘immersed’ ethnographic fieldwork that requires time for unfolding the aesthetics of ‘criminal events’ that intersects with lifestyles, symbolic references, and social structures (Ferrell & Van de Voorde 2010, 37; Young 2011, 108 – 109). When the ‘immersed’ ethnography of cultural criminology connects with the ‘urban’, it is often described as ‘urban ethnography’ (Ferrell & Hamm 1998; Garrett 2013; Ocejo 2013). Moreover, cultural criminological perspectives on urban ethnography include notions of edgework, recreational trespass and urban exploration in sites that are concealed from the public, yet invokes embodied experiences of spatial control (Kindynis 2018; Lyng 1990).

What distinguishes urban ethnographies from other ethnographies is that they take the spatial conditions of the city – its political economy, its diversity, and its culture – into account in their analysis of the people and social groups they aim to examine in that city (Ocejo 2013, 5). Often urban ethnographies are concerned with social inequalities, however, too often they collapse into stereotypes of the urban poor and the oppressed (Wacquant 2002). Urban ethnography has thus been accused

of Othering its subject as a romantic endeavor, and for placing it in a box designed by social predictability and determinism (Young 2011, 153, 161). That is, for example, to presume that only working-class boys paint graffiti because that is their best opportunity to construct an inheritable masculine identity in an urban milieu. Therefore, to be able to construct critical knowledge of a field, an ethnography should give voice to the oppressed, but also to contribute to what is yet-to-come and where changes are becoming possible (Madison 2012, 8). This kind of epistemological approach is of particular relevance for a feminist stance, and when studying marginal groups' rights to the city as lived space (Beebeeyaun 2017).

Urban ethnography entails the researcher's immersion in the urban field, usually by living in the city that is researched, and thus the researcher often becomes both physically and emotionally attached to the research field. In this way, the research field becomes increasingly present in the researcher's everyday bodily experience, both as a way of knowing and as a way of praxis, which thus makes it problematic to cut that field into one singular space. My research field is most simply explained as the graffiti subculture in the city of Helsinki, but at its most complicated is in practice a blurred, non-geographical, and even digitalized space. For both graffiti writers and graffiti subculture itself often travels outside their city through different media. Graffiti travels on trains, on containers, in magazines, movies, books and online. As a methodological approach, I then refer to urban ethnography, in which the field is never a place that can be strictly cropped into one geographic location. The urban ethnographic methodology has enabled a means for collecting data in my everyday embodied experience of the city. By that I mean that my field in this study starts already in the moment when I enter the street outside my home, or when I look out from my office window and swiftly become a voyeur of urban life. Sometimes, the field starts when I pick up my phone and scroll down the virtual updates on the local graffiti scene.

My first-hand data consists of ethnographic field notes written from 2011 – 2019, and 26 ethnographic interviews conducted amongst graffiti writers and street artists from 2014 – 2019. My attempt in this research has been to give a voice to the research participants and to describe their side of the story on Helsinki graffiti. This is an honest wish that I as an ethnographer have been committed to throughout the research process. At the same time, this intention demands a critical perspective on the ways that knowledge is processed and the ways that the researcher assumes the power to interpret the gathered knowledge on a variety of different insights provided

by informants in the field. When the ethnographer then aims to make sense of the gathered data, a necessary “rejection of reality as a unified and singular concept” is usually what follows (Macdonald 2002, 22). That is, it is naïve to believe that I could emphasize all informants’ accounts equally, because often our own conceptions and experiences affect the ways we attempt to interpret knowledge. Thus, the notion of reality is a complexity, which does not exclude the co-existence of other realities in the same field, and at the same time. Indeed, it is likely that another researcher in the very same research field would experience and acknowledge the field from a different angle.

This leads to a necessity to clarify my own positionality in the field, as the ability to reflect the researcher’s individual relation to the field is always vital for ethnographies aiming for critical knowledge (Madison 2012). If the aim is to produce critical knowledge of a field, in this case a graffiti subculture, and to expose and question regimes of power in this field, some in the intersections of gender and control and some between the researcher and researched, then there is a necessity to contextualize how our own subjectivity informs the knowledge produced in the research field. I believe that the ways that researchers encounter subcultures and the ethnographic field for the first time are a vital form of preexposure for defining the ways that we later choose to ask questions about the field. Acknowledging our own biases, ethics, privileges, and power in relation to the field and the participants within it informs the ways that we contribute to modes of knowing (Skeggs 2001). Therefore, to contextualize our own place in the field, is to make this knowledge accessible and transparent, but also vulnerable to judgement and evaluation (Madison 2012, 8).

I will begin by unfolding my own position in the research field by describing a backstage tale. This tale, in chronological order, reflects my ‘ethnographic access’ to the field and my own relation to graffiti subculture by describing the story of how graffiti became quite an important element in my life. This story will also follow how my stance, attitudes and values towards graffiti and street art have gradually developed as a result of getting involved with a variety of different informants during the research process.

Figure 6: "REB" masterpiece by Rebs, late 1990s. Reproduced with permission. Copyright the photographer



5.1 A backstage tale

My interest in graffiti stems from a period when I was around twelve. Back then I knew very little about this phenomenon, but I used to read the tags and graffiti pieces I spotted in my urban surrounding. I was wondering alone what they meant, how they were done and by whom. *Rebs* was a name I would encounter a lot near the train tracks, where I lived with my family. *Rebs* was everywhere - at the train station, under the bridges and in the alleys (see Figure 6). The letters were shaped in a very different way than those we learned to write in school. I quickly recognized that this was not a random practice, and someone was intentionally bending these letters in imaginative ways and repeating it over and over on different surfaces in our small town. Within a few years, I began to contextualize the very basics for this writing subculture; tags were names for real persons and mainly cultivated by boys, but also a practice designed to avoid control and in particularly the *police*:

From the broken window we watched down towards the police car. A moment before we've been climbing on the roof of this old abandoned factory, in which we often came to play, spray-paint the walls and try out our novice styles of tagging.

“Boys come down!” the officers yelled, and we began instantly to run. We ran inside the building, but not far until one of the officers catches me and one of my younger friends. “Show your hands!” he demanded us. They were covered in paint, a typical mistake by beginners. But then, the officer glanced at me closer and in a surprise: “Oh, it’s a girl!” he burst out more to himself than to us. I didn’t know what to say, but the officer made me feel awkward and wrong. (2016, autobiographic note)

I remember my own surprise and my confusing feelings about the officer, who had clearly imagined he was running after ‘boys’. That summer I was fifteen and I made friends with some younger boys, who, like me, were exploring the game of name writing in our small town. We liked to go inside abandoned buildings like the factory building in the note above. The old brick building was built in 1920s and used to be a feed mill in until it was deserted in the 1970s after a fire. It was a *parafunctional space* for micro-subcultural performance (Hayward 2012), where small and odd peer groups could enjoy their creativity and avoid parental or other authoritative control in the city. Rumors said that Satanists visited the building during nights and once we even found a flyer for an illegal rave party, which made us even more excited about the place. We were of course too young to go to rave parties or to grasp any kind of occultism, but to do graffiti was enough to satisfy our lust for exploring the very meager underlife in our small city. Here we could undisturbed watch the colorful pieces painted by older graffiti writers, learn how to read them and vigilantly find out our own writing styles on the brick walls. We were engaged in a process of learning the subculture’s social structure, the informal rules, and the value systems of prestige in the game of name writing. We were obviously the unknown and the novices, and we knew that there were much older and experienced writers who were allotted a status of recognition in our city’s graffiti subculture.

I was the only girl in our small peer group, and I always felt a bit odd because of that. Parental supervision often warns teen girls not to hang out alone with boys in remote areas. However, perhaps because I was a bit older than the others, I never felt any sexual approach or harassment from my peers. I knew I was different to the others, but I still felt safe to explore and to try out tagging techniques without feeling like a total outsider. I was, for my age, still a quite childish and innocent kid, and I did not feel that I was pushed too much by my surroundings to grow up as a young woman, or to proceed into a conventional ‘girlish’ teen-hood by my parents. Unlikely in my school environment, perhaps seen as the quiet ‘good girl’, I felt that I was fairly accepted amongst these graffiti writing boys. I wore loose clothes and my thin body

shape was somewhat androgynous, but I cannot remember whether I would have consciously attempted to perform a specific gender identity. My identity back then was maybe not yet conjured in terms of the normative gender attributes coming from an adult world, but was, as Halberstam (2018, 57-60) describes, drawn from the terrain of childhood that sometimes subverts biological assumptions of fixed gender categories. Yet, my first experience with the police promptly marked me as incorrect and mistaken, not because of doing graffiti but because of being a girl. Suddenly I was embarrassed in front of my two-years younger friend – who, after the police officers' comment, was ogling me.

Gender was not an issue for me in graffiti before we were caught, but the police officer's expectations about who possibly could be a graffiti writer had a crucial effect on my understanding of the subculture. After that first summer, I left graffiti - not because of the experience above, but because I grew away from the boys, and found interests in other subcultural scenes, ranging from animal rights to anarchists. These scenes were more gender diverse, but also more gender conscious, and I learned a lot about feminism. Graffiti writing was still closely related to these alternative scenes, as small towns with only few subcultural individuals tend to share their community with anybody posing a form of resistance on the left side of the politics against the hegemonic culture. As such, I grew up with the idea that graffiti writing was associated with activism, and I remember well how the older activists were educating younger graffiti writers on how to act in police interrogations: "No comment!"

A few years later, in 2005, I moved down to Helsinki as a student. I then got into contact with a local male graffiti writer, as I was asked to send a graffiti magazine to writers in my hometown. In *Publication I* (p. 299), I briefly note how this connection between the writers in my hometown and in Helsinki resulted in me becoming friends with a large group of local male graffiti writers. In a book chapter in *Graffiti in Helsinki* (Tuulikangas 2018) I describe more extensively my very first meeting with this local group:

"One weekend an ex-boyfriend and I met a local graffiti crew on an old suburban train on the M-line. I got into contact with this group through graffiti writers from my hometown, who had visited Helsinki on painting trips over a number of years. The crew was all male, all dressed in black North Face jackets and triple-stripe tracksuit pants. Each of them shook hands with my boyfriend, but not with me. We were all pretty drunk and the guys bombed crazily inside the carriage in front of other passengers. There was adrenaline in the air and although I was not an active bomber

I decided to tag on the floor. Suddenly, I was noticed and the crew members also shook hands with me, and thus I slowly began making an acquaintance with Helsinki's graffiti scene." (Fransberg 2018, 100)

I remember being quite sarcastic that these male writers were only willing to shake my hand after seeing me tagging, because my ex-boyfriend was greeted without a tagging performance. But I still became close friends with them and in particular with Kari who later acted as one of my key informants in this study. These male writers lived in nearby suburbs and at weekends we would often spend time together by drinking at someone's place or, if the weather was warm enough, at parks outside. By the time we had finished our beers, we would take the commuter train to Pasila and then continue with a tram to the cheapest pub in Kallio. We often came in a crowd, regularly ten to fifteen people with united uniforms of sneakers and tracksuits, and we were always alert to the possibility of encountering security guards along the way, especially if some of us took out a marker to bomb whatever surface was found to be attractive. These train rides became continuous weekend adventures, filled with energy and the smell of male-rage. You never knew if some of us would be arrested, but we would then of course defend ourselves, or at least organize a back-up for a possible house raid, for that was a regularity among these young men.

We were the kids of the early 1990s recession in Finland. We were all born in the 1980s and most of us were still below our twenties. We all shared a critical approach against the city's control regimes, embodied in the institutions of police, security companies and the Stop töhrylle project. We were similar, yet so different. I was not only a female, but from the boondocks as they used to say, and they were from 'The City'. I was a university student, while only few of them had completed high school. They would not agree with my understanding of graffiti as a political action and they made fun of my veganism. They were drifters, job seekers, taking courses at vocational school or doing compulsory labor market training. Some of them were officially homeless, while others lived at their mom's house. We were obviously all poor as we were young, students, and unemployed, but some of these male writers had huge compensation debts due to graffiti convictions and many struggled to keep up economically. Thus, some were brilliant shoplifters, and many would increase their pocket money by selling branded sneakers and sports jackets. But as they were socially and economically excluded from both higher education and stable jobs, some would probably recognize them as Helsinki's 'urban underclass' - troubled white

youth making too much noise on the streets. They were often in trouble with the law, mostly because of what they called 'drunk bombing', in other words, writing tags all over the city while heavily intoxicated (Publication I, p. 303). Sometimes a night out on the streets would end up with them being caught by security guards, and eventually some were imprisoned after court proceedings.

I would not describe myself as an active graffiti writer myself, although I did participate in some of the painting actions. Nevertheless, I became emotionally affected by these male writers' experiences of police violence, the chases, the unfair methods of civil guarding and the juridical problems that followed. I felt anger and I truly felt that the city was discriminating against its graffiti writers. This was my initial influence for starting writing about the subculture. But Helsinki graffiti was also different to the other subcultures I had experienced. The adrenaline rush was nowhere so strong than when painting graffiti on prohibited spaces and nothing else was a more ultimate way to claim an own spot in the city, and in an age when becoming someone in the city started ruling. At the same time, it was the most heterosexist and violent field I ever encountered. Keeping up a tough face against the economic consequences that followed after convictions strongly emphasized a 'hard' masculinity, as it was part of the game with the control institutions. But the police investigations of my male peers had also broken many friendships after someone 'snitched', and some of these stories did not end well. I thought a lot about why there were so few girls writing graffiti, although there were consistently girls and women involved as girlfriends, sisters, mothers, and female friends. Often, these women did the greatest work when an arrest or a house raid occurred, both emotionally and physically. They would empty the apartments of anything related to graffiti before the police came and they would keep up the contact between their associate in the arrest cell and his peers outside. The gender roles between the male writers and their female associates epitomized of course a typical conventionalism in heterosexual cultures; the type of femininity that conforms to a hegemonic masculinity, as theorized for example by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005).

The intention to unfold the researchers' personal baggage in the ethnographic field often results in autobiographical descriptions such as mine above. It is difficult to reflect on extent to which the ethnographer should expose her personal background for her audience, and in which moment the ethnographer becomes more involved with her own experience, than in accounting for the experience of the participants in the subcultural field. The call for reflexivity and the researcher

positionality in sociology (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992) has established a critical debate on the autoethnographic self and its meaning for authorizing representations of a social reality in subjective terms (Blackman 2016, 66 – 68). Autobiographic notes are at times critiqued for their lack of generalization and for their possible fallible memory - in other words, for their relevance for science (Ellis, Adams & Bochner 2011, 282). Some scholars have even criticized personal insights as leading to ontological individualism and narcissism, as this may hinder the fruitful dialogue between the researcher and the subject of study (Madison 2012, 197; Terry 2006, 211; Van Maanen 1988).

Soyini Madison (2012, 197) states, in her book *Critical Ethnography*, that autoethnography is at its best used as a broad orientation toward scholarship, because it encounters specific ways of knowing. It reflects on the ways that the researcher is familiar with the subject of the study, and how this affects their ways of collecting and interpreting data in the field. The study at hand is not an autoethnographic study per se, but I think that my own early experience with graffiti as a female in not only a male dominated subculture, but in a system of male dominated control in forms of police and crime prevention institutions, has strongly influenced the ways that I came to learn about this subculture and how I then started to formulate questions about the research field. By the time I started to write ethnographic field notes on the Helsinki-based graffiti subculture in 2011, I had already been socially and emotionally attached to the field for many years. The knowledge and the subcultural experience I carried with me when starting this research project was something that I could not neglect, and this has influenced the research design from the start, both emotionally and in the ways that the empirical data then became collected - often among friends. A failure to note the researcher's positionality leads to a 'hidden ethnography', as Shane Blackman (2007) notes, a state where the researcher neglects their own emotional process in the field and its relevance for formulating an ethically responsible research project.

A deep immersion in the research field may relocate the position of the researcher as an 'insider' and indeed many important subcultural studies have been conducted by those already 'native' within a subculture (Ferrell 1996; Hodkinsons 2005; Leblanc 2002; Taylor 2011). I could be understood as an insider of this particular group of male writers I was associated with, however, I remain somewhat critical of the term insider used in ethnographic approach because it builds upon an epistemology that divides those inside, usually approached as a core center of 'realness', from those

outside, that are understood to be in the periphery – though, assumed to desire the imaginative center of the subculture. Let me illustrate this with my own example. My first experience with the graffiti subculture in Helsinki has been through male writers who were mostly into the orthodox letter-formed graffiti practiced in street bombing, on trains and on tracksides. This had a great effect, in terms of how I initially came to understand what graffiti was – that it should be illegal and letter-based. Looking back, I now think that for a long period I had difficulties in recognizing anything else as significant for graffiti, and I had little interest in other forms of unauthorized art, such as street art and what it as a different domain signified for the subculture. But something changed in my puritan approach to graffiti when Helsinki started to launch legal walls after the break with the zero tolerance policy. In *Publication II*, I describe how the advent of legal walls led to my discovery of a whole new field in Helsinki (492 – 493):

“The legal walls enabled the visibility and meeting of diverse bodies that had remained invisible during zero tolerance and Katri was one of the first graffiti writing women I ever met in Helsinki at one of the legal walls. She was a typical street bomber with her rude and fearless attitude. Before her, I had been largely unaware of other women in the field, even if graffiti subculture has maintained a central role in my sense of identity, tastes and social life since the age of 14. After Katri, I have gradually met more than 30 young women painting street art and/or graffiti in the ethnographic terrain in Helsinki, mostly by drifting around among graffiti and street artists but also through municipal-led youth work.”

Katri was the first female graffiti writer I met in Helsinki, and for a long time she remained the only one. But in 2013 a lot of things changed, and this was partly due to a form of institutional support I was unfamiliar and not comfortable with, but that enabled a connection between isolated women interested in the city’s graffiti field. After graduating a master’s degree in sociology, I was unexpectedly offered a job from a friend working at one of the spray can shops in Helsinki. For three months at the end of 2013, I had the opportunity to act as one of the teachers in a municipal funded female-only graffiti workshop for young women aged 16 - 29. This workshop was organized by the Youth Department of the city and gathered young women to paint weekly on some of the municipal funded open walls in Helsinki. Considering the workshop was a voluntary outdoor activity during a cold autumn and early winter, I was surprised by the broad interest this workshop gained. The participants’ backgrounds were much more diverse than the male graffiti writers I was used to

hanging out with. They were also predominantly white, as Finland in general tends to be, but with a multiplicity of different backgrounds: high school students, vocational students, university students, unemployed and workers. As time passed and I became more familiar with the women participating, I learned that this workshop was for many the first medium for meeting other women interested in graffiti and street art in an otherwise predominately male scene. I was also able to recognize some of their tag-names, previously spotted on illegal surfaces in the urban space, and which now became embodied by young female writers previously unknown to me.

The workshop was also a place for me to learn about street art, that was for some of the women a much more interesting concept than graffiti. In Publication II (p. 496), I note how I was confronted by one of my research participants, *Tiina*, on my own way of talking from a graffiti perspective. She educated me in how street artists are often subordinated by graffiti writers. At the legal walls, I was totally fooled by Tiina's style for she was painting impressive letter-based graffiti pieces and I thus approached her as a graffiti writer. But she corrected me and revealed that she was actually much more immersed in street art. I was totally unaware of what it meant to discuss the Helsinki graffiti subculture from a street artist's perspective, and I still cannot fully authorize such a position. My own biases in being 'native' in a more letter-based graffiti subculture have forced me to pay attention to what this means when recognizing alternative domains to a male-centered graffiti, and when identifying spaces in which marginal roles come to play a more active part. As I noted in Chapter 2, the differences between street art and graffiti are ambiguous, but also distinctly gendered. A number of scholars have acknowledged that graffiti tends to be described as a masculine endeavor while street art is considered a feminine 'adjacent' to graffiti subculture (Macdonald 2016; Tolonen 2020). What does it then for example mean when I do ethnographic interviewing with female street artists, who often are subordinated both to graffiti subculture *and* female graffiti writers? Thus, to engage in street art as an independent art movement means that one should also address the feminist critique of recognizing different subcultural places (McRobbie & Garber 1977).

I think that recognizing street art as a significant and emerging aesthetic style in Helsinki tells us a lot about graffiti as a masculinized space. According to Madison (2012, 89), the aim for a feminist research agenda is usually to dismantle the patriarchal system in entire institutions, but this too often collapses into a narrow

understanding of empowerment of women like ‘us’ and women ‘unlike’ us. This has led me critically to reflect on what an ‘insider’ is, and what it means to be defined by the distinction between an ‘authentic’ center and a periphery marked by those as outsiders to the subculture. Uncritical insider research can too easily lead to a knowledge focused on the dominant perspectives in the subculture, while it fails to present narratives by those excluded from the ‘inner circle’.

There is one last phase I would like to add into my backstage tale. In 2015, I became familiar with a whole new circle of graffiti writers in Helsinki, which further changed some of my initial perspectives on graffiti. For a long time, I was very much influenced by the previous male-graffiti circle with their strong masculine working-class attitude, complicated with more or less serious criminal offences, debts, and other social deprivations. Graffiti crews or ‘cliques’ in Helsinki are of course not generalizable into distinct social classes, nor are they totally isolated from each other. They overlap and some individuals in my old circle were acquainted with the male writers in this new circle. As the previous social circle, these graffiti writers were also chiefly into street bombing and trains, but it was possible to distinguish a social difference in these two predominantly male-circles by looking at how they perceived each other in a stylistic reference to an ‘ideological topography’ of subcultures (Westinen 2014).

The general ‘ideological topography’ of Finland describes the country as south-centered, with the metropolitan area of Helsinki as the economically, culturally, and educationally most active region (Westinen 2014, 47 – 53). Elina Westinen (2014) confirms that this ideological topography reflects subcultural performance in Finland, such as in rap music, and I propose that this also applies when it comes to Finnish graffiti. Subcultural media on Finnish graffiti mainly focus on the graffiti scene located in Helsinki, as noted in Publication III. Helsinki is presented as the center for Finnish graffiti, however, there are also other topographical ideologies *inside* Helsinki, and ‘power geometrics’ often guide youth to ‘know’ their place in lived spaces (Tolonen 2019). My old circle was mostly Helsinki-born and living in the suburbs, while individuals in the new circle of graffiti writers had partly moved in from other towns and settled in the city’s downtown districts. If I was understood as rustic by my older circle, in this new circle I was a person associated with the background of the graffiti writers from the suburbs:

“I’ve heard about you, but I thought you was some kind of freakin’ hood bitch” Osku laughs. “But you’re ordinary” he says. I ask what’s a hood bitch. “Like someone

speedy who only stays in the hood, paints sometimes and then return to the hood”.
(fieldnote, summer 2015)

Osku was also from a smaller town. I found Osku’s comment funny, for in the first place the graffiti writers he associated me with was not much into drugs, perhaps weed but nevertheless a lot more into drinking and not always in a healthy way. His group of friends was actually much more liberal in regard to recreational substances.

In some respects, this new circle came to represent a shift in my ability to recognize a new cultural class in the city’s graffiti subculture. Many graffiti writers in this new circle were by profession living as artists or were employed in segments associated with the cultural industries - they were performing a certain bohemian style within the context of reproducing the city’s urban culture. They could perhaps be described as a ‘creative class’ (Florida 2002), maybe not economically more stable than the previous circle, but equipped with a middle-class attitude in the urban context of Helsinki. They were creatively active in many ways by coordinating exhibitions, organizing street parties, publishing graffiti magazines, investing time in DIY-constructions in public space, and some were also in charge of underground galleries in the city. Many had an education in the arts, others were self-taught. Some of them were also involved in cultural venues organized by more prestigious art museums, such as *Helsinki Art Museum* and *Kiasma*.

This social circle also allowed me to connect with a group of female graffiti writers I had not been acquainted with before. I had already developed a close friendship with Katri and together we would gossip about tags in Helsinki that we believed belonged to other female graffiti writers. But through this new community, we became introduced to exactly those female graffiti writers we only had heard distant rumors about earlier. This gave me a privilege to become immersed in a small female community with a more nuanced and multi-gendered approach to graffiti subculture in Helsinki. These female writers became essentially important friends to me, and they still are.

5.2 Emotional spotting as an edgework

Let me now turn the attention to the urban ethnography of the *edge*, for among cultural criminologists the term ‘edgework’ as a specific politics of the field has been both praised and critically debated (Ferrell & Hamm 1998; Lyng 2004). Edgework

describes performances related to the negotiation of a boundary line of 'risk' in the ethnographic field, sometimes actively sought by the researcher for the reward of emotional experiences and sensations (Ferrell & Hamm 1998; Newmahr 2011; Naegler & Salman 2016). All my sub-studies (Publication I – IV) touch upon the issue of edgework as an ethnographic approach for studying graffiti in the city of Helsinki, chiefly because graffiti is, when painted without permission, considered from a law perspective as a criminal act, yet also because I have myself been emotionally involved with this subculture. These sub-studies have framed a methodological approach for how to study a phenomenon that often keeps a distance to official society, and for collecting valuable research data among youth who have become criminalized through zero tolerance.

The term 'edgework' became a popular concept among cultural criminologists in the early 2000s, after the works of social psychologist Stephen Lyng (1990, 2005) and the book *Ethnography at the Edge* by Jeff Ferrell and Mark Hamm (1998), who scrutinizes the immersion of the researcher in the field as a position of having an attentive gaze, a sort of criminological *verstehen*, who must practice a high level of reflexivity in order to stay true to the subject, that is neither "romanticism (n) or the generation of pathology" (Young 2011, 109). The 'edge' then mainly referred to risk taking experiences in the field of deviancy, the 'losing of control' and crossing a line beyond the law and rational, in order to constitute a sense of autonomy and conceptualizations of self-reflections in deviant acts (Miller & Tewksbury 2010). In short, "edgework is a means to excise control and autonomy by both symbolically and physically confronting those sources that seemingly deprive the actor of control over his or her fate" (Naegler & Salman 2016).

Edgework have become criticized for its gendered bias and overtly focus in middle-class 'masculine' high-risk activities, such as extreme sports, by several feminist researchers (Laurendau 2008; Lois 2003; Miller 1991; Newmahr 2011; Rajah 2007). These articles have underlined that the use of the term in cultural criminology has often refined the binary of 'active' males as risk-takers, and 'passive' females avoiding dangerous endeavors, although women most likely develop skills on daily basis necessary for orienting the risks in patriarchal and misogynist societies (Naegler & Salman 2016, 361). Feminist perspectives have then improved the term by showing that "women who engage in edgework are not simply 'mimicking' men" but act in reference to the cultural dimensions of gender ideals (Naegler & Salman 2016, 363). For example, Gailey's (2009) study on a virtual pro-ana community presents

‘female edgework’, where young and predominantly white women push themselves in starving practices in order to challenge passive notions of femininity. Nonetheless, some feminist approaches to edgework have challenged the focus on skills that often frame masculinist ethics including individualism, hierarchy, and competition, by emphasizing interpersonal emotional and psychological boundaries, and social interdependences as a component of risk taking (Newmahr 2011, 692). Blackman (2016, 72 - 73) proposes an emotionally situated edgework as an alternative to masculine emotionally ‘cool’ edgework, and suggests for an ‘emotional edgework’ could operate in feminist analysis of high emotions and intense feelings between researchers and research participants. Here, emotional edgework may frame intimate talks, and blur the boundary of researcher friendship and friendship (Blackman 2016).

Considering the perspectives of edgework presented above, in graffiti, it is often a matter of a certain ‘attentive gaze’ that recognizes and understands the subcultural artefacts in the urban milieu. In other words, in graffiti subculture it is about what some know of as ‘spotting’. In Publication III, I develop a methodology of spotting, that refers to the so-called ‘spot theory’. Spot theory engages in the discussion of graffiti writers’ spatial ecology, that is the different places, or ‘spots’ graffiti writers and street artists perceive as important places to do graffiti on (Ferrell & Weide 2010). Spotting is walking through the city and its media, reading the newly written tags upon the electric box on the street corner, or noticing the graffiti pieces on the commuter train passing by on your way to work. Spotting is also related to the subcultural skill for selecting an appropriate surface, a ‘spot’, for graffiti writing. The selection of an appropriate spot often reflects the compromise between the factors of location, visibility and risk (Ferrell & Weide 2010, 49). However, spotting is rather the practice of when someone already painted a spot, and the spot is after this subcultural performance ‘seen’ by others, sometimes ‘live’ in the urban milieu, sometimes online on social media platforms.

In Helsinki, it is not only a matter of spotting fresh graffiti and street art pieces, but also which spots have become buffed and repainted, for these will once again offer a clean space for a new piece of art. This is an important practice for many writers who are used to the graffiti removal industry. In fact, that one’s graffiti piece may be washed away once is something you expect. You wait and watch to see which writer will be the next one to claim that specific spot again. In this way, the spotter can watch the interplay between different socializing and sometimes competing

actors and the controlling forces that once again sterilize and discipline the spot. This type of attentive gaze in the urban space, ‘the eyes that see’, often remains essential among those who long ago left the subcultural scene, but who have forever become affected by graffiti writing as a practice for exploring the city (Tuominen 2019).

In Publication III, I explore the methodology of spotting by emphasizing the researchers and research participants spatially engaged edgework in tracing and photographing train graffiti in traffic. Documenting graffiti pieces in Helsinki is an important subcultural ritual, for illegal graffiti is often short-lived, and often demands writers to return to the ‘spot’ (sometimes in motion as a train or metro would be) in order to have the graffiti piece photographed in broad day-light (if painted at night). Some graffiti writers are perhaps more enthusiastic about photographing graffiti than painting themselves. As described in Publication III (p. 15), spotting is thus “a powerful source to mediate, transform, and promulgate subcultural spots that physically appear as temporary and ephemeral, often as a result of control policies, most notably the zero tolerance policy under which graffiti is quickly removed from urban space.” I have thus mainly engaged in spotting as a documentation practice of graffiti and asserted this as a methodological approach for conducting ‘subcultural knowledge’ among criminalized graffiti writers (Publication I).

Photographing graffiti covered trains is not a practice without risks, though legally permissible, still socially non-acceptable by the train company in Helsinki, as noted in Publication I, III and in IV. Photographing graffiti covered trains at train stations could be noticed by security guards, train drivers and conductors, resulting into regular clashes between graffiti writers and train staff. An active train spotter described his experience with guards attempting to stop him for photographing graffiti on trains. He described in an interview that he no longer paints trains himself, but that he has become emotionally attached to the train writing subculture by engaging in the train spotting practice. He regularly attempts to switch sites for spotting graffiti on trains to avoid clashes with security guards:

Atte: One guy from Avarn [security company] was there, he called me ‘boy’, though he was clearly younger than me, like what are you doing there? I looked him in the eyes, told him ‘mom says I’m not allowed to talk with strangers’ and left. (...) One time they [guards] stop the train [I was in] and they were trying to find me. And when I started to go to Pasila train station, then the confrontations became tougher. The time when it got darker, like there was no light enough, so I had to go on the platform, well then this tough guy came to me, like are you again going to take flicks? I just told him that let the trains roll and left. (...) It’s getting worse every time, another

time they wanted to search my bag because they [guards] told me I was smelling paint. (...) But they can't do anything unless they call the police. It's ridiculous when someone in his twenties calls me a homo, and I'm forty-five. You're like, are you serious. You're a guard and you supposed to ensure the safeties here. They take me as the enemy, because they know who I am, they know what I've done.

Atte's story confirms well the 'masculine competence' in graffiti subculture (Macdonald 2002), though, here with a reversed age structure that challenge common conceptions of the young and immature graffiti writers and the adult-like authoritative control (see e.g. Kimwall 2015). Atte plays along in the misconceptions of his age when approached as a 'boy' by a guard, as he ironically replies with a general parental advice. However, in our interview, he also points out to the guard's immaturity by referring both to his younger age and homophobic language. In fact, the age structure and the issue of maturity was often lifted as a subject among ageing male informants, who described incidents with younger guards and police questioning if they were too old to be painting graffiti.

As a female bodied researcher, I was, at first, useful for many of my male informants in photographing train graffiti at train stations, for I seemed to be less suspected by the train staff and therefore able to photograph a train at a close distance (Publication I; Publication III, p. 17). It allowed me a specific access to the field amongst train writers, and a way to engage friendships with a male-dominated train writers community in 2011. In the beginning of the fieldwork I remember many times feeling applauded when managing a 'great shot' for some older male train writers. However, in Publication IV (p. 12) we note, that a repeated bodily act "at times (...) manage to challenge normative beliefs such as those that are related to gender" also in graffiti and street art, by referring to another ethnographic field note of mine – in which I describe how I eventually was arrested by the police for photographing train graffiti. After years of doing fieldwork in the local graffiti subculture, also my body appearance had become 'known' for the local authorities combatting graffiti in the city, and this has clearly reduced my own engagement with the subculture.

My emotional attachment with the subculture has changed much from being a more active agent in the subculture, to become merely a 'voyeur' of graffiti subculture in the very recent years. I am not actively 'doing' graffiti, though, I cannot help spotting when I walk through urban space. Staring at, and reading tags in public space, still generates as an instinctive habit of mine, and still enables the realization

of diverse visual patterns that shape social relations in the subculture. Some graffiti writers always paint together, some have specific spots they like to paint, some always use specific pens or a typical color, some are unknown newcomers, and at times you spot those who were long gone and have now returned to take part in the subcultural play. This gaze is something that you learn to use constantly when walking through urban space, and often this matter of spotting becomes the subject of talk among other graffiti voyeurs who engage in the same practice. These subcultural conversations on spotting may be phrased for example as, “Did you see those new pieces on the trackside?”, or “I saw some unfinished train panels this morning” and “Somebody had a run, right?” while looking at an Instagram update of another unfinished graffiti piece.

The talk between graffiti voyeurs also presents perspectives of idealized gender relations, often in a granted heterosexual way. When two graffiti writers with different sexes are spotted together, they might be approached as a couple:

Topi ask: “Are Anna and Varis together?”. “Why?” I ask. “Well, they’ve been painting a lot together lately”. I reply: “All right. Are you and Kari together now?” I am joking. Topi says: “Haha”. (fieldnote, 2016)

Doing emotional spotting describes well some of the ethical challenges in this research setting. Researching graffiti in city space *and* being a researcher among friends requires a large amount of sensitivity when conducting participatory observation. I could relocate the knowledge gained from spotting graffiti into the social settings among those graffiti writers I personally knew. I could also later resituate the knowledge I had gained by spotting after I conducted an interview with someone I did not know well. This type of research method has both beneficial and ethical concerns. I often felt that I was a voyeur among friends, and that it was hard to capture a role between being an altruistic friend and a researcher, but also because I was responsible for presenting the research data in a way that is true for the research subject, but which was difficult in the same time when being emotionally attached to the field. Some graffiti pieces I was visually more attracted to, however, I am not sure if this was always grounded in my aesthetic taste, or because I was close to someone painting a specific tag, thus warmly affected every time I spotted this specific tag. At times, I became interested in a tag, because I knew the person behind was a female. My spotting gaze is therefore partly selective, yet one that may

recognize intimate relations hidden behind the social rhythms of street tagging, that benefits from intimate knowledge and from doing field research among friends.

5.3 Data and fieldwork in practice

I have used a range of different data sources for this research. Graffiti books, magazines, movies, online sources, news articles, police reports, court cases and anti-graffiti material from the Stop töhrylle project are important archives for understanding how control and gender are constituted over and amongst graffiti writers in Helsinki. However, the main data for this research consists of the ethnographic field notes conducted between 2011 and 2019, and the 26 ethnographic interviews conducted between 2014 and 2019. In this subchapter, I will summarize my methodology at a more practical level, and describe how in practice I have collected the research data. I will also comment on how I have ensured that the research methods I used are approached in an ethical manner.

Before I started the first phase of the fieldwork in 2011, I was quite troubled with the issue of how to approach my friends and to reveal my wish to conduct ethnographic fieldwork on their criminal activity. It was odd to change my position from a friend to a researcher, especially as in the beginning I was quite unsure about what fieldwork actually meant. I felt very shy when I was asking for consent to write notes on a situation that occurred in the field. Some writers were quite worried about where I would keep my field notes and who else would be allowed to read them. Many friends denied consent, and I was not surprised as some had experienced a lot of trouble with the law. I was more surprised when some writers gave me instant consent to write field notes so long as I ensured complete anonymity. For some this meant that I was only allowed to write field notes with pseudonyms, but not to tape an interview with them. Some writers considered it a risk if an authority, such as the police, would gain a hold of a recording containing recognizable information.

It was also complicated to understand where a field started and where it ended, in particular when the field was 'multi-sited' and not occurring in one place (Marcus 1995). For example, when was I 'hanging out' as a friend and when was I 'observing' as a researcher? After years of passing, I have reached the insight that this is perhaps not a dualized identity with two opposing counterpoints. Rather it has been a process of understanding my own identity in relation to the field and being comfortable with

having friends following my research process. As such, it is not only me observing them, but that they may also observe me by reading my articles and chapters. Even if there are some problems with fitting a long-term ethnography into a thesis by publication, there is a benefit in that my informants have been able to evaluate my work while it is still in progress. This process has improved my self-confidence as a researcher at the field and I have become more easy-going at approaching informants to participate in my research.

I have conducted fieldwork amongst informants on a number of different sites. This includes open spaces in urban settings, such as on the streets, legal walls, train stations, along train lines, at so-called fames, and exhibitions, but also in more closed spaces, such as at writers' homes and at studios. In the field, I have usually only written short notes or 'buzz-words', which have helped me to remember feelings, conversations, and experiences in the field. Sometimes I drew maps on a social situation and often I took photographs which were utilized when writing down field notes. Thereby, I have mostly written my notes alone and outside the field, at home or at my office the day after or in the evening when I returned home. With exception are the autobiographic memorial notes on graffiti related events occurring before the actual fieldwork took place.

I started to tape my first participant interviews in 2014, first with female graffiti writers and street artists after realizing that I did not have access to 'their' field outside of institutional forums, such as the female-only workshop I was involved with. Women's presence in the male-dominated scene was obscured and their way of 'hanging out' was different to the male crowds I was used to. I wanted to know more about their approach to the field, and intimate interviews allowed better access to this. A year afterwards, I started to conduct interviews with male writers. My attempt in all the interviews has been to generate an open dialogue between me and the research-participant, and therefore each interview has been different. Some interviews were more informative on gendered issues, others focused on graffiti writers' subcultural media practices, whilst some described encounters with control. Participant interviews were conducted in parks, at fames, at studios, at the participants home and in cafeterias. The place was always chosen by the interviewee, as I wanted to make sure that the interview situation would be comfortable for them.

I have been committed to safeguarding the anonymity and confidentiality of my research participants and therefore I use only fictional names for them. Some of the fictional names may relate to informants' ethnic backgrounds, but this is not

consistently the case. I am also not using informants' personal tag-names as a substitution for pseudonyms, even if this seems to be a common approach among many graffiti researchers (Ferrell 1996; Macdonald 2002; Pabón-Colón 2018; Snyder 2009). There are several ethical reasons for why I do not do so here. First of all, Helsinki is small and so is the graffiti community. Most of graffiti writers know each other, even if not always personally. That is, based on a tag-name, many writers form an opinion on a graffiti writer's stylistic references and commitment to the subculture. This includes things such as if one is considered as a toy, king, outsider, insider, active, non-active, or even totally unknown and thus not a 'real' writer. I am not engaged here with authorizing a subcultural knowledge that conforms or challenges perspectives on who is 'worthy' enough to be interviewed, rather this is a task for those who are involved in producing subcultural media, such as publishing graffiti magazines or updating Instagram accounts. Moreover, to discuss sensitive issues related to gender, sexual identity, experiences of sexism or even cases of open misogyny would be a difficult task. It would also be risky to describe experiences of control, for example the encounters with police if there is any danger that these empirical descriptions would add to authorities' insights on an individual writer's behavior, for example when escaping control. All of these issues would become difficult to analyze if I were to include research participants' tags, when the aim is to critically analyze the power regimes both inside and outside the subculture. Therefore, tag-names are only included when I refer to secondary sources, such as graffiti books, in which tag-names are already mentioned, or if referring to public events such as art exhibitions featuring a specific graffiti artist. Few exceptions are included when a participant describes for example her/his childhood idols in graffiti.

Some argue that ethnographic research should be conducted in a systematic manner in order to "capture" its subject and their ordinary activities in "naturally occurring settings" (Brewer 2002, 6). This involves locating research procedures logically in a way that is believed to be the best method to gain a comprehensive picture of the object of study. I have to say that my ethnographic fieldwork has been much messier than that which many ethnographic handbooks describe and has often been a very unsystematic process. This is why I am influenced by a critical ethnographic approach. Critical ethnography looks at the ways in which sources are ordered, aiming to challenge their *status quo* as knowledge formers, and thus searches for, and reorders, authoritative regimes of "truth" (Madison 2012, 6). In order to account for a critical knowledge, one must encounter multiple sites in the field and

engage in dialogues towards substantial and viable meanings (Madison 2012, 10). In this way, critical ethnography emphasizes a dialogue between different voices, aiming for multiple voices and challenging epistemological hierarchies.

My attempt in this research project has been to collect data as a dialogue between different informants and sources. By looking at multiple sources presenting different perspectives of the field, I have aimed to frame the knowledge process as a form of dialogue that presents the field as multi-faceted. Ethnographic analysis is rarely understood as a research set that produces knowledge by objective means. Rather than aiming for an equal framing of a dialogue between these different sources, I acknowledge that the participant interviews and the ethnographic field notes weigh more in the analysis, and do have a status as primary data, while the archival data are understood as a complementary data. Nevertheless, the archival data have an important role in presenting the history of the field, and especially in understanding graffiti as a discursive formation produced between control and subcultural ideals of gender performing. Loic Wacquant (2002, 1523) describes the importance of linking broader systems of material and symbolic relations on a macro level to a micro level when undertaking sociological analyses of an ethnographic field. This type of methodology recognizes the effect of the broader structural forces that govern and give meaning to social mechanisms and strategies in subgroups. For example, when Kimwall (2014) claims graffiti as a discursive formation, he refers to its creation and distribution through exchanges of different statements between local sociocultural circumstances, institutions, and mediated representations. I apply this perception as a strategic tool when analyzing sources and comprehending the field created out of different perspectives. As a summary, below is a list of the different sources utilized during the whole research process.

Ethnographic field notes. Conducted between 2011 and 2019 and formed as a textual field diary. These field notes deal with the authors observations, experiences, and discussions conducted in the field together with research participants, often in relation to the researcher's positionality. Field notes include urban exploration and the spotting of graffiti. I also include my own archive of photographs taken during my fieldwork in this set of sources.

Participant interviews. In total, 26 participant interviews were conducted between 2014 and 2019. These semi-structured and thematic interviews were recorded and then transcribed. 16 of the in-depth interviews were conducted with women aged between 19-34 at the time of the interview and 11 interviews were

conducted with men aged between 24 – 43. Interviews varied from 60 minutes to three hours.

Juridical documents. I collected all graffiti related court decisions made at Helsinki Court of Appeal between 2000 – 2018 (to June), in total 28 cases. In addition, I have had the opportunity to collect several juridical documents provided by informants from the field, such as the pre-trial investigation reports made by a graffiti unit at Helsinki Police Department. In these documents, I have mainly been interested in looking at the types of investigation methods police have used, and what role the private security companies have represented in finding the prosecuted guilty at the court cases, and how the severity of sentences has developed during the years during and after the Stop töhrylle project.

Subcultural media. As part of the wide array of different sources in the ethnographic field, I have collected a set of data that is defined under the category of subcultural media. These are a collection of Finnish graffiti magazines, both DIY-stylistic xerox copied zines that emerged in the 1990s and color printed amateur magazines that have continually been published since 2000 in Finland. These magazines explicitly concentrate on graffiti; letter-based painting, street bombing and tags – while street art is often relegated to a marginal space in the magazines. In this source, I also include graffiti books that contain important interviews with Finnish graffiti writers, and which in this thesis have often worked as a comparative source for my own observational notes. I have also watched several graffiti movies that include scenes from Helsinki/Finland and which have provided me an insight into how Helsinki tends to be presented to an international graffiti subculture as a ‘controlled’ city. Most of these underground graffiti movies concentrate on train graffiti and are made by graffiti writers who are not based in Helsinki but who have travelled to Helsinki.

Mass media. I have also used a set of Finnish news articles and TV reportages on graffiti, that together are categorized under the label of mass media. I have often used these sources for double checking facts, such as the year for a specific event, but also to acknowledge the ways that reporting on graffiti has changed during the years. Most of the mass media articles I use are published by *Helsingin Sanomat*, which is considered as the leading daily news-paper in Finland. Also, a specific website that includes a collection of graffiti-related print media article have been helpful for researching the national mass media archives: <https://www.krmi.net/articles.php>

(10.6.2020). This site is one of the oldest websites focusing on Finnish graffiti, and was actively publishing photographs on Finnish graffiti between 2003 – 2009.

Anti-graffiti material. A specific section of the data is categorized as anti-graffiti material. This material was directly produced by the Stop töhryille project. This includes pamphlets and an educational video intended for the public to inform them of the necessity for a zero tolerance policy on graffiti. Even if this anti-graffiti data is a minor category compared to the volume of other types of data collected, this has had an important role in presenting how the control policy against graffiti has worked on a local level, and how it has aimed to influence public opinion.

5.4 Sub-studies in the field

The results of this thesis are grounded in the four research articles, Publications I – IV, in which I have ethnographically explored the Helsinki based graffiti subculture, its control policies and gender dynamics. Each of the articles touches upon different thematic issues emerging from the field of Helsinki's graffiti subculture and they analyze different segments of the collected data. Even though the empirical data related to each sub-study could be approached as discrete sets, I approach the entirety of my ethnographic data as a whole. This is due to the ethnographic style that follows the researcher's immersion in the field. Thus, I have greatly utilized my field notes and archival resources in all four publications, though there is a lot of ethnographic richness that is lost in a compact research article. I will briefly summarize each article and describe how each paper was developed, whilst they are indeed available for the reader in their complete versions in the appendix of this thesis.

Publication I (2014), "Graffiti knowledge – An ethnographic study on the subculture of graffiti writers"²⁰ was published in *Oikeus* (eng. "Justice") – a Finnish academic journal for juridical policy and crime justice. The data in this article consists of the very first intense participatory-observation fieldwork that was carried out as part of my MA thesis (Fransberg 2013) over a period from November 2011 to January 2013. My aim in this paper was to describe how 'subcultural knowledge' among the city's male graffiti writers forms an important source for constructing

²⁰ This title is an English translation of the original title in Finnish. A complete English translation of Publication I is found in the appendix of this thesis.

subcultural capital in a zero-tolerance milieu. Zero tolerance policies, as already discussed in Chapter 3, rely on a belief that the invisibility of graffiti – through ‘buffing’ – will eventually eliminate the subcultural capital, namely ‘fame’ amongst graffiti writers. Fame is a key concept in graffiti studies, which positions subcultural visibility as the driving motive for writing graffiti. However, this perspective proved too simplified when it came to the case of train graffiti in Helsinki. The visibility of graffiti pieces on trains were rather controlled; painted trains were quickly removed and were often only seen by those who were the early birds taking the morning’s first rush hour trains into the city.

As part of my early fieldwork, I started to photograph train graffiti together with the research participants. Through this practice, I learned how the circulation of trains in the city represented an important subcultural knowledge for how to paint trains – an information that was rarely shared outside the close group of train writers. This subcultural knowledge on how the trains circulated on different tracks became an important way to form social bonds between the male writers. Their photographs were often the only proof of their ephemeral train graffiti, and therefore they became important objects for the male train writers. The train company’s hard-hitting zero tolerance politics and their strict surveillance methods constrained the train writers’ activity to a secret society and shaped a form of *controlled fame*. These male train writers were not particularly interested in becoming seen by a wider graffiti community, and paradoxically the city’s control politics were understood as a way to maintain boundary against the intrusion of other subcultural individuals not perceived as ‘hard core’ enough.

Publication II (2019) appeared as an article in *Journal of Youth Studies*, entitled as “Performing gendered distinctions: Young women painting illicit street art and graffiti in Helsinki”. This sub-study shifted radically from the previous study, for it was based on wholly newly gathered empirical data grounded in a very different subcultural perspective. In 2014, I started to contact some of the women I had met at the female-only-graffiti-workshop I was involved with in 2013, to gauge their interest in participating in my research project. At the time, I was delighted to meet other female graffiti writers at the ethnographic field and I eventually interviewed and conducted ethnographic fieldwork among eight women over a period of six months for the sub-study featured in Publication II. This included day-time painting, hanging out at social events related to the graffiti scene, and interviews with each participant. My attempt was to paint at least one time with each of these participants

as a method of engaging in a female community in the Helsinki-based graffiti subculture, and as part of this process I developed a further friendship with some of the study participants.

Four of the participants identified themselves as street artists and four as graffiti writers. Both street artists and graffiti writers described the difference between the two artforms in terms of ‘real’, ‘pure’ and ‘illegal’ graffiti and ‘different’, ‘something else’ and ‘less harmful’ street art. However, street artists were less prone to mark themselves as strictly street artists, while graffiti writers were much more laid back with identifying themselves within the graffiti label. Pointing at the differences between the two art forms was, however, rather means to participants to demonstrate their “subcultural knowledge, as ‘outsiders’ did not always see the differences” (Publication II, p. 498). Although, all participants have painted in public space without a permission, in other words, illegally, none of the street artists had encountered control authorities, but three of the graffiti writers had encountered a police force because of graffiti writing. Scholars on graffiti have often granted fame and the risk-taking experience as the main motivation for painting graffiti (e.g. Macdonald 2002; Snyder 2009). While all participants did experience excitement in doing art without permission, they seemed to be less interested in gaining subcultural fame. One of the street artists describe how she is not interested in doing letter-based graffiti because of not being motivated by the “fame thing”, and a graffiti writer explains how she is not driven by “advertising” herself. Two graffiti writers admitted that fame did have a meaning for them, but one of them describes how she does not want to become known as a “she” (p. 499).

Publication III (2020), entitled “Spotting Trains: An ethnography of subcultural media practices among graffiti writers in Helsinki” was published in *Nuart Journal*. This peer-reviewed journal engages in active field research on unauthorized urban creativity and is a major academic forum for graffiti and street art research. Publication III followed some of the same participants that took part in my first article (Publication I), and thus could be approached as an account of my long-term ethnographic fieldwork. My data in this article was three-fold. I used the field notes I had collected from 2011 - 2019, I analyzed a number of Finnish graffiti magazines and other subcultural media sources, and I conducted in-depth interviews with six ageing male graffiti writers.

The article focuses on subcultural media practices among male train writers in Helsinki by applying the so-called ‘spot theory’ developed by graffiti scholars (e.g.

Ferrell & Weide 2010). In this paper, I connect to the spot debate by developing the methodological tool of spotting trains, to include the photographing of them - which I had now been engaged in for several years. I describe spotting as not only a subcultural skill for selecting an appropriate place for graffiti writing, but also as a way to occupy a spot by regularly extending it in a mediated dimension such as online or in a graffiti magazine (Publication III, p. 15). I also conclude on graffiti writers' preference for subcultural publication in local graffiti magazines, while avoiding publishing online. However, graffiti writers were actively 'following' online publications, such as specific Instagram-accounts in order to extend their subcultural knowledge on the local scene (e.g. who paints and where), and in this way utilize online information in their own train writing practices.

Publication IV, "Embodied Graffiti and Street Art Research" was co-written together with PhD student Maria Myllylä (University of Jyväskylä) and Dr Jonna Tolonen (University of Lapland). While the three other publications focus solely on my own research project, this article constitutes a broader interdisciplinary approach to graffiti and street art research (GSAR) presented by the three scholars' disciplinary insights on the research field. Our purpose in this article was to introduce a debate on GSAR scholars' distinct methodological approaches, which are often established in a deep qualitative method engaged in embodied experience as part of the research epistemology. GSAR has mostly used qualitative methods and explores urban space through multiple ways that range from visual recordings to ethnography, often emphasizing the researchers' own reflexivity in relation to spatiality. In the article, we identified how embodied methodologies in GSAR, such as edgework or walking in the city scape provide multisensory research results, such as visions, cognitions of social and physical feelings and emotional experiences, which are not traditionally understood as important sets of research data. The different disciplines the authors presented include the field of arts (Tolonen), cognitive science (Myllylä), and sociology (Fransberg). These disciplines generated us in a constructive way to approach embodied experience as forms of research knowledge. The article acknowledges the ways that researchers' own mobility is often crucial for conducting field research and can be structured along cultural definitions of the body, such as gender binarity. The article argues that GSAR has a lot to offer the larger academic field interested in developing in-depth qualitative methods.

These four publications could be understood as windows to the research project, that are presented in different journals for different academic audiences. Publication

I is intended for a national audience interested in social justice and crime policy. Publication II explores why it is that women or femininized identities in graffiti subculture are marginalized and is published for an international audience interested in subcultural youth research. Publication III is published on a platform for international researchers already familiar with GSAR, and as such discuss more specific debates related to graffiti studies. Lastly, Publication IV researches the methodologies of embodied research knowledge while legitimating GSAR for a broader academic audience.

In the next two analytical chapters that follow, I will employ the findings from these publications in a broader perspective, but I will also add some new perspectives in order to make sense of the ethnographic knowledge on the meanings of gender and control among graffiti writers and street artists in Helsinki. Over time, graffiti has become controlled in a different way; official politics in the cityscape are less hard-hitting, subcultural definitions are perhaps less strict, and subcultural gender boundaries are more negotiable today than they were ten years ago. This is in particularly apparent in the ways that I initially understood what ‘real’ graffiti subculture was (see Publication I for a discussion of difference in graffiti subculture and graffiti culture), and in how, in a later article, revisiting this definition forced me to renegotiate these boundaries, in particular when realizing the significance of institutional support for a more multi-faceted gender perspective in graffiti subculture (Publication II). On the other hand, contemporary graffiti is now a larger phenomenon than just the ‘subcultural’, and this is visible in the many ways that graffiti today is approached by the cultural institutions of the city, in youth work and in public space. This has certainly had its effects on the ways that contemporary subcultural identities negotiate boundaries in new urban spaces, such as those virtually performed in social media for a more international subculture than ever (Publication III).

6 CONTROLLING GRAFFITI WRITERS IN THE CITY

One of my primary interests is grounded in how graffiti subculture is controlled by authorities, and thereby how the control system is experienced by graffiti writers on the streets. What I mean by a control system is the law, criminal justice, police institutions, and security forces operating in the city, but also the criminological atmosphere at a given time that works as a buffer for promoting certain policies, such as the zero tolerance policy in Helsinki in 1998 - 2008. A criminological atmosphere is influenced by the social and cultural politics at a given time and may be recognized through discursive reflections in the media and in public discussions. If we briefly review the criminological atmosphere in Finland during the mid-1990s and 2000s, it is apparent that an ethos of control culture in the form of policing the streets has been generally approached as a positive mean to safeguard citizens' welfare in public space (Korander 2014; Koskela 2009). In particular, the order and cleanliness of Finnish streets has been understood as a direct indicator of wealth, security, modernity, and functionality (Lovatt 1995). It becomes difficult to make spontaneous and impulsive events on Finnish streets, as these performances are in principle presented as a disorder and therein a threat to citizens wellbeing (Hirvonen 2011). Hence 'disorder', a condition that does not follow already made urban plans, but is created out of human imagination, becomes a symbol for deviance and is then understood as a direct gateway to crime. Anything unexpected and different is regarded as suspicious and at least non-normative. This kind of criminological atmosphere in Finland was grounded in a neo-conservative approach to crime and has been prolific for zero tolerance campaigns as a particular method for intervening youth "at risk" in the welfare society (Harrikari 2008; Korander 2014; Koskela 2009). Some authors suggest that this time epoch represents a generation of children that became prohibited to play any imaginative games within a control society (Laajarinne 2011).

Criminologist Timo Korander (2014, 206) argues that the best way to explore the ethos for a control culture on the streets is to place the empirical evidence from the streets in the center of the analysis, and to include historical, juridical, political,

societal and urban cornerstones as a contextual frame. When I reviewed my ethnographic field notes and participant interviews by focusing on the forms of control graffiti writers face in the city, and framed these findings with the juridical documents, Stop töhryille material, and news articles, two distinct aspects emerged.

First, I found that the formal control over graffiti in Helsinki is selective and that gender is a major structure for shaping its selectiveness. ‘Hard control’, in the form of institutional punishment, is most likely directed against young men, and those individuals with less resources to tackle the consequences of control are hit the most. Remarkably, throughout the whole research project, it was most often only the male graffiti writers who were caught by the official ‘net’ of the criminal justice system and who experienced the ‘hard end’ of the control system in the form of imprisonment and compensation claims. Male graffiti writers often point out that this is only because there are fewer female graffiti writers and that females paint less than their male peers. While outnumbering may be a part of the explanation, it does not explain why female graffiti writers or street artists tend to face very few juridical consequences, even when they are caught red-handed (Publication II). Very few female graffiti writers have faced juridical consequences on the same level of severity as male graffiti writers. This is in particularly interesting when looking at Finnish self-reported surveys on juvenile delinquency between 1995-2016, which show that “wall writing” is just as common amongst 15-16 year old boys and girls, and at times even more common amongst girls (Näsi 2016, 31 - 32). “Wall writing” can of course relate to any kind of graffiti, and not necessarily to the kind of graffiti related to the specific youth subculture researched in this thesis. However, if this is the case, then only a certain kind of graffiti, that is the graffiti associated with the youth subculture, seems to be a primary concern for the control system.

Second, time plays a role in the intensity and the style of control on graffiti. Graffiti was practically criminalized in Helsinki between 1998 and 2008 due to the zero-tolerance policy, but the five last years of this time period was the most brutal for graffiti writers. A cooperation between a specific graffiti unit at Helsinki Police and the private security company FPS operated on a street-level to catch graffiti writers, and as a result a number of large court cases against groups of male graffiti writers were held. Many young graffiti writers were compelled to pay large compensation claims, often to public entities, such as the public transportation companies operating in Helsinki. I would argue that the intensity of surveillance during this time, both on the streets and on an institutional level, led to the growth of a distinct

zero tolerance generation of graffiti writers, who share a collective and often very traumatic experience of control. The closer we come to the present time, the less brutal are the consequences for being caught painting graffiti, at least for male graffiti writers.

There are no recent modifications to the Criminal Code of Finland that would affect the criminal status of illegal graffiti. Rather, the changes in criminal justice outcomes is a result of a different political atmosphere that has reduced the deviant image of graffiti and that has allowed another perspective on graffiti to emerge after the break from zero tolerance. Today, graffiti and street art are increasingly accepted socially and culturally, as they are consumed, valued, and exploited as part of the hip urban culture in Helsinki City. All kinds of cultural theatres are invested in presenting graffiti and street art in different ways: in art galleries, youth work, public legal walls, commissioned street art, and in the sections for culture in the daily newspapers. At the same time, the difference between legal and illegal graffiti has never been so important, and this offers a new type of control that could be described as the “domestication approach” (Kimwall 2014, 111 – 112). As Kimwall states, a domestication approach to graffiti is primarily concerned with the wellbeing of graffiti-interested youths, and instead of a total prohibition of graffiti, this perspective promotes an incorporation of graffiti into society, which falls into an ideology of socialization.

Control is the major focus in this chapter, whereas gender will be the primary focus in the following chapter. What follows in this chapter is an overview of how control over graffiti in Helsinki has operated and how graffiti writers, mostly men, have been affected by the formal control system. My intention here is to examine the premises of the Finnish legislation, which makes it possible to prohibit graffiti, to sentence graffiti writers, and to saddle them with life-long debts. I will then scrutinize some of the large police investigations on young male graffiti writers and the court proceedings that have generated a specific experience of control for graffiti writers in the city, and hence shaped what I describe as the zero tolerance generation. I will also comment on the zero tolerance project’s influence on graffiti writers’ right to mediation in legal proceedings. Finally, I observe how several public events in the later period of the zero tolerance era became significant stages for writers to rage against the control system, and I show how the male experience of the control system has influenced the subculture’s violent hetero-masculine framings. I base this analysis on my ethnographic observations, and individual interviews with

participants, but I also use findings from the range of juridical documents and mass media reports presented in the previous methodological chapter.

6.1 Criminalization of graffiti in public space

This section outlines how graffiti is constituted as a punishable act in Finnish law when painted without permission in “public space” and on the “property of others”. The law seems to be constituted in a way that prescribes what public space is and for whom it is intended for. One way to further elaborate on this is to look at how graffiti is defined by the law as a criminal act and to assess this definition according to an ‘anarchist epistemology’ (Ferrell 1996). As Ferrell (1996, 190) writes, “anarchist criminologists take a political/economic perspective into the courtroom and the street to observe the interactional dynamics between cops, judges, lawyers, and criminals.” An anarchist approach to law allow us to elaborate our knowledge of institutionalized injustice. I will therefore refer to a few laws that make it possible to sentence graffiti writers in Finland to jail and to lifelong debt in the form of compensation claims. My intention is to illustrate how the legal system seems to operate on the principle of protecting ownership against those who, at least in symbolic terms, reclaim property and disrupt the aesthetic order by painting graffiti over a surface.

When I examined the graffiti court decisions made at Helsinki’s Court of Appeal in 2000 – 2018 (see Table 1 in this chapter), they all reductively approach graffiti as an act of criminal damage against property, thus the rationale for punishment is usually grounded in the costs of the graffiti removal. This appears reasonable, as ownership is a fundamental right of the capitalist model of society, and from this perspective we expect that our property should be protected by the law. However, there are a number of other fundamental rights recognized in modern societies, which could approach graffiti as a form of freedom of expression or freedom of thought (Kimwall 2014, 134). Looking at graffiti from a very different perspective, we could then instead of approaching graffiti as an act against a property, ask *who* has the right to define how our urban space should look like?

When graffiti or street art is painted in public space without permission, it is by the Criminal Code of Finland described as *Criminal Damage* in Chapter 35

(769/1990)²¹. The law on criminal damage does not explicitly use the term graffiti in its subject matter, yet it is with reference to this law chapter, that graffiti writers have been prosecuted and sentenced at district courts and courts of appeal in Finland. Chapter 35 describes criminal damage in three severities:

“Section 1 - Criminal damage

A person who unlawfully destroys or damages the property of another shall be sentenced for criminal damage to a fine or to imprisonment for at most one year.

Section 2 - Aggravated criminal damage (368/2015)

(1) If the criminal damage causes

- (1) particularly serious economic loss,
 - (2) the victim particularly significant damage with due consideration to his or her circumstances or
 - (3) considerable damage to property that is of special historical or cultural value,
- or

and the criminal damage is aggravated also when assessed as a whole, the offender shall be sentenced for aggravated criminal damage to imprisonment for at least four months and at most four years.

(2) An attempt is punishable.

Section 3 - Petty criminal damage (769/1990)

If the criminal damage, when assessed as a whole, with due consideration to the minor significance of the damage or the other circumstances connected with the offence, is to be deemed petty, the offender shall be sentenced for petty criminal damage to a fine.”

Graffiti is thus not criminalized as a concept, for example as an art form or as freedom of speech, but as an act against property. The act of damage is hence always subjected to a property, and therefore requires an injured party to raise a prosecution against a suspected offender, *unless* the property is owned by a public entity. An

²¹ “Criminal Code of Finland”, translation by Ministry of Justice, p. 146 – 147
(https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/kaannokset/1889/en18890039_20150766.pdf, 27.12.2019).

injured party can then be represented both by an individual or a representative of a company or a public entity, such as a municipality or a state unit.

If one is found guilty of the act of criminal damage, a perpetrator is liable for damages caused according to the Tort Liability Act (412/1972)²² and, therefore sentences are most likely to include a compensation claim. The compensation claim is based on the costs incurred for the removal of the graffiti from a property and is approved by a jury in the district court or court of appeal. The compensation claim for criminal damage is moreover defined by the Interest Act (633/1982)²³, in section 8:

“Interest for late payment for compensation of damages caused by an intentional offence must be paid from the date the damages occurred.”

In other words, the interest is collected from the first day a graffiti piece or tag is painted, though the amount of the compensation claim is defined in a court decision that often occurs years after the damage caused. The interest accrued for late payment was the focus of the major critiques I heard from graffiti writers who were subjected to large compensation claims, because this dramatically increased the amount from the original costs of graffiti removal. The problem with interest for late payment is that the Finnish justice system tends to be highly congested and is often thus incredibly slow. Several experts in law have publicly warned that this slowness has created a clamp down on citizens’ juridical rights²⁴. For a single case to go through the whole chain of different legal institutions starting from a crime report, continuing with a police investigation, then a decision to prosecute, a first dealing of the case at the lower district court and then perhaps a second round at the court of appeal, may in the end result in a process that takes several years.

To illustrate this, let me describe an example from the graffiti writers I connected with early in Helsinki. In 2005, one of my main informants, Kari, was at the age of eighteen prosecuted at Helsinki’s District Court for painting graffiti in 2002 - 2004.

²² Tort Liability Act (https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/kaannokset/1974/en19740412_19990061.pdf, 25.5.2020).

²³ Interest Act (https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/kaannokset/1982/en19820633_20130032.pdf, 25.5.2020).

²⁴ HS, 17.01.2020: “Oikeusprosessit venyvät Suomessa todella pitkiksi, koska samat asiat käsitellään kahteen kertaan” [The judicial processes in Finland are slow, because the same things are processed twice] (<https://www.hs.fi/politiikka/art-2000006376502.html>, 25.5.2020).

Kari was only 15 – 17 years old at the time when the graffiti he was accused of was painted. At the District Court the jury found him guilty of nearly 80 counts of criminal damage, in which the complainant was either Helsinki City, Helsinki City Transport or the railway company VR. Kari was wrongfully convicted on some of the counts and he therefore appealed to Helsinki's Court of Appeal. In 2007, the court finally decided on his case, and he was found guilty for most of the counts, though not on all the previously convicted for. At the age of 20, Kari was sentenced to eight months of conditional imprisonment and was responsible for a compensation claim of nearly €13,000, *plus* the interest for late payment. The interest rate for the compensation claim on the oldest cases from 2002 had by then ran over a period of five years. Now, the court decision on his graffiti case, as all the other court decisions I examined, defined the interest rate according to the Interest Act's section 4:

“The amount of the interest is eight percentage points higher than the reference rate referred to in section 12 in force at the time in question”.

The reference rate for interest is defined by the European Central Bank every half year, and during the last twenty years this rate has varied between 7 – 11.5%. Simple mathematics then for a compensation claim would go like this; let us say that the removal of a single graffiti piece would cost €1000. The reference rate is then for example 10%, but eight points are then added, thus the interest rate for late payment in total would be 18%. Now, if the final court decision is given five years after the damage occurred, as in some of the counts in Kari's case above, then the amount for the compensation claim would nearly double during this time period ($€1000 + (1000 \times 0.18 \times 5) = €1900$).

There are also additional costs and fees that follow when the debt is handed over to privatized enforcement authorities. All kinds of costs are then included on top of the original amount; schedule fee, processing fee, disbursement fee, and the list goes on²⁵. A myriad of different rules on interest rates and additional fees come into play when graffiti writers try to read the bill sent home after a conviction which demands a very different amount than that displayed at the court hall. It is this complicated mathematics, operating under an economic logic of debt collection, that frames an

²⁵ “Enforcement fees” set by Finnish judicial authorities (<https://oikeus.fi/ulosotto/en/index/ulosotto/ulosottomaksut.html>, 27.5.2020).

unfair vision of the criminal justice procedures and predicts the future among some convicted graffiti writers who are unable to pay the large compensation debts. It becomes difficult to rationalize the amount of debt, as the payments often seem to never end as the interest always increases the amount.

Ultimately, the debt is often garnished directly out of one's income or by confiscating profitable property. With such economic consequences, some graffiti writers lose their motivation to work and lose their access to credit. It becomes difficult to rent an apartment, to open an account for internet access and to plan anything that requires a long-term commitment to future goals. It is much easier to live day-by-day. Kari was not lucky enough to have a social network or an economically wealthy family that could have helped him with his debt along the way to adulthood, and he was not the only one I met. At times Kari did a few months of work, for example washing dishes in a restaurant, but very quickly he realized that his wage would be cut by one third by the enforcement authorities²⁶. He was also not able to receive tax refunds, as these were always directly garnished by the enforcement authority. This was why Kari decided from an early age that there was no reason for him to find a full-time job if he was never going to earn a reasonable amount of money from low-paid jobs. More than a decade after his decision, he reflected on his life path:

“I got so many bills, that I decided to give up and let it loose. If I would not have those bills, then maybe I would have gone to work and that would have reduced the writing part. But I'd rather paint trains and live outside the society, because I had nothing to lose when it came to my economics.” (2018)

Hille Koskela and Minna Ruotsela (2005) have stated that the Finnish crime prevention in the 2000s was grounded in an “exclusionary paradigm”, which means the structural suppression of those who do not fit in the order of society, such as graffiti writers who are economically excluded from the society when caught and sentenced to huge compensation claims (see also Helin 2014, 21). Apart from considering what might be an economically and socially appropriate way to punish graffiti writers at a very young age, graffiti writing may of course also be understood as an egoistic act, if one claims the right to write on whatever surface only because one finds a certain place attractive and exciting to paint on. As citizens in

²⁶ “Attachment of salary” by Finnish judicial authorities (<https://oikeus.fi/ulosotto/en/index/velallisenaulosotossa/palkanulosmittaus.html>, 27.5.2020).

constitutional states we usually expect that our property will be protected by the law against anyone vandalizing it. But a different logic applies when we think about the ownership of public places, which we commonly regard as having a right to use as citizens in the city. Indeed, graffiti writers often prefer to paint on surfaces that are not considered as privately owned property but as public space. Large concrete fences, abandoned houses, the metal surfaces of trains, tracksides, and the electric boxes on street corners are regularly used by graffiti writers. However, choosing spots for graffiti is often about an aesthetic vision, and that it is the surface and the spatial position of a spot in public space that attracts graffiti writers (Publication III, p. 16). Graffiti writers often works in a dynamic sense to the already planned, by looking at what the cityscape is able to afford them. As such they are anti-authoritarian and aesthetic modifications of city space on a grassroot-level. For example, when Ferrell (1996, 187) offers an anarchist reading of graffiti, he states graffiti is a “crime of style”, which “clashes with the aesthetics of this authority as well”.

It is remarkable, that the only law in Finland that explicitly uses the Finnish term ‘töhrä’ (‘graffiti vandalism’) is the Public Order Act (612/2003)²⁷. The general purpose of this Act is to safeguard security and to *maintain public order* in a public place, which is defined as:

- “a) a road, street, pavement, market square, park, beach, sports field, water area, cemetery or similar area that can be used by the public
- b) a building, public service vehicle or similar, such as government office or other office, public transport station, shopping centre, business premises, or a restaurant which is in public use either for the duration of a particular event or otherwise”

This Act does not prohibit graffiti writing *per se*, but in the act’s Chapter Three on “Banned objects and substances” it states:

“Section 13 - Possession of substances suitable for painting graffiti

Possession of spray paints and paints or other substances highly suitable for painting graffiti on the property of others is prohibited in a public place without a valid reason.”

²⁷ Public Order Act, translation by the Ministry of the Interior
(https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/kaannokset/2003/en20030612_20100774.pdf, 26.5.2020).

The Public Order Act was constituted in 2003 and gave patrolling police the legitimate right to confiscate spray paint, in other words an individual's belongings, and to write a 'on-the-spot-fine' without a court decision. Koskela suggests (2009, 248 - 249) that the law implicitly criminalizes graffiti writers in Finnish public space and notes that while public space is quite precisely described in the law as a common space for everyone, as an "area that can be used by the public", there seems to be no contradiction in prohibiting possession of spray paint in public as a means to protect "the property of *others*" as stated in the act. Accordingly, the ownership of publicly defined space is here imposed on the principle of maintaining control over an already established order. As such, anything that proposes a difference in an already defined social order of the public space becomes a threat, for example changing an aesthetic view on the streets by painting graffiti.

The Public Order Act was introduced in 2003, five years after the launch of Stop töhrylle project, yet the preparation of the act started the very same year as the project in 1998²⁸. This is not a coincidence, as this period witnessed a more general 'toughening up' of the criminological atmosphere in Finland, and graffiti – or 'töhrý' – had become a widely debated phenomenon in local media and at the municipal council (Ihalainen 2017; Mäkinen 2010). Zero tolerance on graffiti is not only about influencing public opinion, it has also an actual effect on law enforcement by influencing legislation that labels graffiti as a deviancy (Kimwall 2014, 122). For example, in the governmental proposal for passing the Public Order Act in the parliament (HE 20/2002), 'töhrý' is recognized in four categories: "complex wall paintings", "signature writing", "political wall writing" and "intentional vandalism", yet in the same paragraph the proposal concludes that *all illegal wall paintings are always considered as 'töhrý'*, no matter their artistic or ideological value. Moreover, the proposal states that graffiti vandalism reflects the lack of control in an area and creates a state of insecurity, which is a direct reference to zero tolerance ethos on graffiti. The proposal concludes that a majority of illegal graffiti is painted by "organized groups" which are, according to the police, difficult to stop, hence confiscating spray paint in public space was recommended as a preventative measure in the work against graffiti²⁹.

²⁸ Governmental proposal, HE 20/2002 vp, p. 29
(<https://www.finlex.fi/fi/esitykset/he/2002/20020020.pdf>, 27.5.2020).

²⁹ HE 20/2002, p. 23 (<https://www.finlex.fi/fi/esitykset/he/2002/20020020.pdf>, 27.12.2019).

This moment was passed in the legislation as part of the Public Order Act in 2003, despite three law experts out of four, in a pre-review of the law made for the Constitutional Law Committee, found this moment problematic in terms of its impreciseness³⁰. In particular, the “substances highly suitable for painting graffiti” and the “valid reason” for carrying such substances leaves a lot of margins for interpretation, for in practice these substances may include anything from oil paint to chalk pens. Moreover, the judgement of a “valid reason” for possessing spray paint in public space gives a lot of power to the police. The decision to stop and search is most likely based in the young person’s bodily appearance and movements, and their presence on the streets after school, at night and on weekends, makes young people in public space a particular target for a law like this. Neither are there any exterior agencies evaluating the confiscation of young people’s property and the police proceedings at ‘the spot’ on a street-level.

To illustrate this problem, I will describe one of my informants’ cases in 2011, where a police officer had written a fine for her without any negotiation about the possible reason for her possessing spray paint. Eija had been to a legal wall, and after spending time outdoors she and her friends decided to have a drink at a pub. She was on her way home later that night when she noticed that a civil car was following her on the street. She recognized the car as belonging to a security company, and as she did not know anything good about these guards - whom according to many graffiti writers were working in plain clothes in order to identify graffiti writers in the city – so she decided to run. Obviously, the guards reacted by calling the police. Soon the police were after her and she heard them screaming “Stop!” That winter was snowy, and she fell down on the snow when the police caught her. She was handcuffed and dragged into the police car. At the police station she was locked up for the night without any questioning, and the next morning she was released with a fine for possessing the spray paint found in her bag. There were no questions or any official interrogation, just a fine placed in her hand. She suspected this had to do with the fact that there was nothing else they could suspect her for, as she was not doing tags while she was walking home that late night from the pub, and that she still decided to run away from the guards that were following her. As she explained,

³⁰ Perustuslakivaliokunta, pöytäkirja 29/2002 vp (https://helda.helsinki.fi/bitstream/handle/10224/4835/HE%2020_2002%20%282%29%20vp%20%28ptk%2029%29.pdf?sequence=2, 27.5.2020).

she was just “unlucky to be spotted by the guards on her way home”, who were often lurking in the alleys in that district, looking for writers.

The fine (€40) for possession of spray paint can be opposed, but only by appealing to the district court, thus then risking additional court costs which, for a young or poor person, can be economically grave. Eija did initially oppose the fine, but at the last moment she pulled out her appeal due to a fear of ending up with additional costs. Such fines will only stay within the police register; thus they are not a visible marking in a person’s criminal register. As a person with less resources to oppose such fines, it may sometimes be easier to accept a minor consequence than to fight at a higher level for a re-evaluation of this penalty. However, I never heard of anyone else being fined for possessing spray cans, except for Eija and two other women. This may partly be the result of the increase in the number of legal and open walls in Helsinki since 2009, which may give people a legitimate reason for carrying spray paints. Therefore, I am quite convinced that the “Section 13” regarding the possession of spray paints in Public Order Act would not pass today in the legislation, at least not in its imprecise form it was formulated in 2003.

6.2 The legacy of zero tolerance

One of the biggest court cases against male graffiti writers in Finland was held at the Helsinki’s District Court in 2005³¹. Twenty-two young men aged between 17 and 21 were prosecuted for more than a thousand graffiti pieces and tags painted on trains, metro, tracksides and on the streets between 2003 and 2004, at a time when the prosecuted were aged between 15 and 19. The police suspected that these young males had caused damage by their graffiti writing amounting to more than €200,000. Helsinki Regional Transport requested €40,000 – the largest compensation claim for a single incident of damage in the trial. The trial with nearly 1000 counts took a week for the court to process. In the mass media reportage on the court case, the public prosecutor presented these graffiti crews as syndicates for organized crime by pointing out their ‘criminal’ crew names. Subsequently, many of the young males were sentenced to conditional imprisonment, whilst a 19-year was sentenced to

³¹ Helsingin Sanomat 2.8.2005: ”Yli 20 nuorelle syytteet töhertelyrikoksista” (<https://www.hs.fi/kaupunki/art-2000004326712.html>, 29.5.2020), the pretrial investigation report conducted by the police and the court decision for this case is used as references here.

unconditional imprisonment for 1.5 years. This is the most severe sentence known for graffiti in Finland.

The pre-investigation material was massive for the case, and the first page of the investigation report states that the police has established a graffiti unit to investigate the increasing levels of graffiti vandalism in Helsinki. As a result of their strong cooperation with the private-owned security company Finnis Protection Service (FPS), a 'network' of different graffiti crews was identified. When reading through the pre-investigation material gathered for this court case, one can note that several of the young men were arrested and kept in cells for 1 – 3 days. However, one 17-year old was locked up and isolated for 17 days. Another 18-year old was kept in a cell for 45 days and during his detention was interrogated almost every second day. A third male, a 17-year old, was kept in detention for 19 days, then set free for a month, and then locked up again for 11 days. All three were students at vocational schools. They were eventually released on condition of a three-month long house arrest, which allowed them only to attend school during the day and obliging them to a weekly attendance at the local police station. Any breach of these rules would instantly return them to custody to wait for the trial to begin.

The number of interrogations conducted by the police for this case is massive, which exemplifies the amount of police work on this tangle. Although the average time registered for an interrogation in these files is normally made within an hour, one single interrogation with a 17-year old boy took 7 hours and 35 minutes. It is evident that the police were pushing these young individuals hard both by locking them up and by on several times implying what other suspects may have told them about their actions. One of the interrogation reports notes an 18-year old's testimony:

"I have now been imprisoned here for 7 days and arrested for 6 days for the same thing, even I am innocent. It is obvious, that it is not possible that I would have been at the crime scene, for at the time I was home and I have two witnesses for this, which have no reason to lie about this. I know that no-one of the other suspected have told you that I would be involved, because it is not true."

Nancy Macdonald (2002, 96 - 97) describes how graffiti writers may use their illegal activities to construct a masculine identity, in which deviance moves beyond an applied label towards a deliberate function to prove 'men's work'. However, as Macdonald (2002, 98) asserts, scholars should be conscious when defining what

‘masculinity’ is, and therefore rely on both ‘outsider’ and ‘insider’ accounts when doing so. I have no doubt that illegal graffiti provides an excellent opportunity to experience thrill-seeking adventures, to earn respect amongst other young graffiti writers, and to accumulate a form of subcultural capital by taking risks when painting on trains and other spots with high surveillance. This is exactly what I describe in *Publication I*, even if I prefer to complicate the concept of ‘fame’ and its meaning for graffiti’s subcultural capital in a zero tolerance milieu. Graffiti is removed quickly under zero tolerance, often within 24 hours, which affects graffiti writers’ possibilities to construct a famous alter ego in the form of a tag-name, or a ‘virtual self’ as Macdonald (2002, 194) puts it. Surely subcultural media, such as graffiti magazines or online-platforms, represent an alternative canvas for constructing one’s own fame, but this is established in filtered and controlled ways (*Publication I*, p. 307, *Publication III*, p. 18). A quotation from one of my informants may serve as an explanation for what I mean when I state that writers in zero tolerance milieus are engaging a ‘controlled fame’:

Atte: We were literally sitting on top of our photographs, we didn’t want to send them anywhere. If someone asked, then we might give them something. But I think that principle is still standing, the crowd is not doing it because of fame, but because they dig it and love this - showing off has never fit well in Finland. If you start to pose too much, well then you’ll have the cops after you, and you become wanted.

I do agree with Macdonald’s (2002, 108 – 109) idea that subcultural recognition in ‘urban warfare’ would not be possible without two competing actors: graffiti writers and the authorities who have been assigned to control graffiti. However, Macdonald (2002, 110 – 123) places this battlefield mainly in the train yard as the ultimate place for proving one’s masculinity, but pays less attention to the aftermath of this performance and to what happens when graffiti writers get caught (124 – 125). She mainly recognizes writers’ positive outcomes when being recognized by their ‘enemies’ and the ‘fame’ that is gained from mass media attention to graffiti writers’ court cases. She writes “(a)fter-show reviews follow, but their negative write-ups are unimportant” and concludes that, “(w)ith one’s name in lights, prosecutions begin to lose its negative overtones” (Macdonald 2002, 125). Macdonald makes an important point in her subcultural analysis, and that is to recognize graffiti writers’ agency in this urban ‘war’ with control, which is not simply imposed on writers as a deterministic structure. My aim here is not to depart from Macdonald’s perception

of illegal graffiti as a meaningful tool to construct a type of outlaw masculinity, but rather to acknowledge that *different* forms of control (from zero tolerance to a domestication approach to graffiti) do make a difference in the ‘after-show’.

In this section, I will further examine the experience of zero tolerance among the specific generation of graffiti writers in Helsinki and explore their social legacy for the male-dominated subculture. There are not many other subcultural youth generations in the Finnish post-war era that have been so labelled, punished, moralized, and excluded from society, then the predominantly male crowd of graffiti writers in Helsinki during the Stop töhryille project. Their experience of zero tolerance is distinct to them, and it is this experience that makes their generation different to other graffiti generations. In 2019, I interviewed Jokke, a Helsinki-born 41-year old male graffiti writer in his kitchen:

Malin: It’s a decade since zero tolerance now, do you think the present generation who grew up without zero tolerance and in a more positive atmosphere, what’s their perception on zero tolerance and that our subculture used to live in a zero tolerance?

Jokke: They can’t understand it. It’s like if you try to explain to a child, that you had this kind of telephones in the 90s, well they get it, but they won’t understand why there are no pictures of it. So, when the atmosphere will change again, at that point I bet there are many art students whose life will be fucked up.

Malin: You think it’s going to change at some point?

Jokke: Yes, it will. You know, they try it by publishing some negative accounts on graffiti in the news and then check out what’s the reaction on that. You know it can’t continue like this. Sure, now the sanctions and that’s on a justified level, but maybe they’ll get a graffiti police again working on some big cases. Because now, we had a blast for three-four years now. Many had the chance to do a lot without any negative consequences. Not like before when you would stay in the cell for several days.

Malin: Yes, I thought that the new generation isn’t traumatized like, they will have some positive vibes on the subculture now?

Jokke: Yes, sure and they can do stuff a whole differently than we did, they can think differently, like if you don’t have debts on several thousands, you don’t have that problematic foresight on the future.

Jokke was one of the first graffiti writers I got to know when I moved down to Helsinki. Back then he was living in the city’s rental house and in the same neighborhood as I did. Today, he still lives in the same neighborhood, but together with his wife and toddler in an apartment they have bought together. I always thought that Jokke was one of those writers amongst his peer group who managed to carry on quite well after the chaotic years of the mid 2000s. I asked him what

made him survive amidst all the compensation claims he was sentenced to. “I had to, there was no alternative” he replied promptly. After a thought, he continued by suggesting that it makes a difference if you have a social network that can support you. I know Jokke always had a good relationship with his mother, and we used to tease him about that when we were young. But he says he paid his graffiti bills, which came to €20,000, on his own. One consequence of these compensation claims was that Jokke lost his credit rating, and he described how, for many years, he did not have the right to an internet or telephone subscription, and that he once lost a job opportunity because of his downgraded credit. Only seven years ago, Jokke re-established his credit rating, enrolled in higher education, and is today living an economically and more stable life. He never stopped painting graffiti and still paints weekly at so called day-time spots, and is convinced that he will always be interested in graffiti in some way or another.

In Summer 2019, I interviewed another writer who was also about 40-years old. I met Sebastian in a greenery park in a downtown district of Helsinki. Sebastian is also one of those writers who since the end of the 1990s has regularly painted graffiti and is still one of the most active graffiti writers in the city with his multicolored graffiti pieces popping up on anything from trains to walls and tracksides. I became familiar with Sebastian in the early 2010s and met him occasionally at the spray-can shop or at graffiti related exhibitions. Graffiti was perhaps only his second life, after his family with a bunch of kids, and more or less full-time work and studies. Back then, I often thought it was a bit peculiar that a father would sometimes sneak out and paint with us. But today, many writers of his age have children and some of them even paint graffiti now together with their offspring. But Sebastian likes to keep graffiti and family separated. He notes that his family does actually not know much about his secret life. When I ask him about zero tolerance, he recalls it as a painful time “that got you hating society”:

Sebastian: If you think about that stalking and those court cases, that was a pain in the end of 1990s and early 2000s, that was really awful. Even when you painted somewhere and you got home [safely], and there was nothing, you could still end up in an interrogation and in worst case in a court process. If your style was recognizable, that was already a risk. I don’t know, me and my friends had a lot of motivation to paint a lot of stuff, yeah we took a conscious risk, and yeah we got busted but then we did even more. That got you hating the society and got me almost being an outcast. Then I got bills and I started to shoplift all my clothes and all my food and did other illegal stuff to get money. I remember, at one point I didn’t apply for

unemployment benefits for more than a year, because I was doing unlawfully pretty well, that was insane. Then I went to the social security office, yeah ok, now I need some money. And they asked me how I had got along, where did you get your money. I told them, I've shoplifted it all and did other stuff, I can continue with that if you don't give me money. Well, then they gave me some.

These narratives on experiences of control in Helsinki illustrates the cumulative effect of zero tolerance on graffiti writers' social and economic wellbeing. As Jokke and Sebastian describe, their adolescence under zero tolerance left them with dire economic consequences, and on the margins of becoming social 'outcasts'. A third male graffiti writer recalls his experience of zero tolerance:

Otto: Well, there was all kind of stuff going on when I was blamed, suspected for aggravated damage, and they started to investigate me in a very tough manner, checking out where I was drifting at and they'd put on a surveillance on my phone and checked up my nearest circle. So, they'd tried to find out if there were any other people taking part in that case. And then, it was a quite long time to be locked in during the investigation just alone, and once a week they'd open the door and ask if I had anything to say. I just always told them that I've done nothing. And they'd put me back and tried to tenderize me out that I would... and yeah like that. Then they let me out, but they were still tapping my phone, you know not only checking out the locations of my movements but really listening to my calls. And then they followed us, the graffiti police followed us to Porvoo³², for they had the legal wall there, and there they'd sit in the bush and film us, like that." (interview in 2014)

Otto was twenty-four years old when a large investigation was launched against him for a series of cases of graffiti vandalism. He woke at home one morning with the police knocking at his door. The police officers raided his house, confiscated his computer, and brought Otto in for a pretrial detention. Otto's story was not exceptional, for many other male graffiti writers I met had faced similar consequences. This type of large police investigation, targeting a graffiti writer by following his moves in the city, has resulted in traumatic experiences for many male graffiti writers. Some became paranoid, after DNA-testing, and having their personal voice and scent registered – like 'real' criminals.

Being caught by the security company FPS often became the starting point for a police investigation. Several informants, as well as other sources (Brunila, et.al. 2011, 69), have reported that the FPS guards often used covert surveillance as a method

³² A small town near the capital area.

for catching graffiti writers. Although it seemed an unjust method to many writers, this is a permissible surveillance method for guards in Finland³³, which differs from the rules for guards in Sweden for example (Kimwall 2014, 123). However, it is questionable if covert surveillance can be regarded as a preventative method, as the offender usually first has to commit an act before being stopped. And this was what many graffiti writers stated that the FPS were doing – they were not stopping them painting graffiti until it was possible for them to read and recognize a tag-name. Many writers learned to be conscious when painting graffiti and some writers became quite successful at recognizing plain clothed guards and remembering the plate numbers of the cars used in covert surveillance.

Nevertheless, as many male writers from this time period witnessed, having problems with the police did not require that a writer be caught red-handed for painting a specific tag-name. Much more fear was evoked by what Sebastian refers to when he says: “(i)f your style was recognizable, that was already a risk”. This is the police method that graffiti writers in Helsinki refer to as “style-analysis”. This translates to the specific *graffiti style expertise* offered by a guard from FPS used in police investigations and in trials to identify an individual graffiti writer’s personal ‘style’ (see also Publication I, p. 304). A court decision at Helsinki Court of Applied in 2007 notes:

“Lokka states, that he in general recognizes an offender’s personal style after the first time he was caught, even if he would after this change his tag. Lokka also states that he in general knows to which gangs a tag-name belongs to. Gang-tags were also able to be recognized by each individual’s style.”

In several of the graffiti court cases I examined (see Table 1), the same guard was invited as a witness and was described as an expert on the graffiti subculture. A man named Petri Lokka was the head of the former security company FPS, and as in the quote above, claimed his ability to recognize the consistency in a personal graffiti style, also when a person was using several tag-names. In some court decisions, it is also noted that Lokka had a schooling in graphology skills, which was aimed to support his expertise. This form of style expertise, offered by a private owned estate, was perhaps one of the most controversial effect of the zero tolerance policy in Helsinki. Graffiti writers described the style-analysis as an unjust method in the ‘cat

³³ Private Security Services Act, see Section 32 “Using a guard uniform” (https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/kaannokset/2002/en20020282_20030765.pdf, 29.5.2020)

and mouse' play between writers and control agencies. Some writers stated that they had been wrongfully convicted because of misleading testimonies made by the guard. Kari was one of them: "The judge believed in everything that the guard said, it was just a walkover for them". And as a result, as Jokke says: "People were convicted for no reason. It was a very destructive time in many different ways and the culture was destroyed". Graffiti writers felt that the standard of proof in the courts was not always on a justified level, and that they were sometimes convicted merely on circumstantial evidence. In fact, one of the court decisions implies that the standard of proof on graffiti cases could be lowered because graffiti in general is a difficult crime to investigate:

"Making tags is typically an act of criminal damage, that often excludes outright evidence. Therefore, it is justified to emphasize the expertise testimony in the case. There is no reason to mistrust the testimony of Lokka's knowledge on tags." (Helsinki Court of Applied in 2005)

It is difficult to assess how much these testimonies based in so-called specialist expertise in graffiti style have actually resulted in the conviction of graffiti writers. Without a sufficient analysis of all different forms of evidence, that were used against graffiti writers, it would be difficult to make such a direct claim. However, it is at least likely that these expert testimonies played a supportive role in finding the prosecuted guilty in graffiti courts. There is also no doubt in that this graffiti expertise has played a crucial role in police investigations on several graffiti cases, in continuously providing police with information from the 'streets'.

Lokka's expertise on graffiti styles was, nevertheless, not always accepted as an objectively formed truth, and in few of the courts his testimony was actually critically evaluated from a number of perspectives:

"There is no reason to mistrust the expertise Lokka has gained during the about eleven years, when he has apprehended graffiti vandals and therefore possesses a knowledge on the graffiti culture and of the aims of its authors. The witness has however *no scientific schooling in handwriting identification, nor has he an expertise on arts or in arts science*. The maneuvering of a graphologist's skills is not reliable for a testimony in handwriting identification which is requirement in court. Handwriting identification is moreover not a useful method for identifying graffiti and tag writers. *Graffiti and tags are stylistically very different to normal handwriting*. Forensic laboratories

have usually refrained from giving any deductive or concluding statements on these markings (graffiti).” (2006)³⁴

“Witness Lokka has not been able to clarify his research method, but it seems he has been conducting some sort of a form analysis. Form analysis cannot be approached as an objective mean to secure definite results. According to the district court, a form analysis should be approached critically as this alone does not outweigh the probative value.” (2002)

It is interesting to note how Lokka’s graffiti expertise in the first excerpt above is contested - firstly, because he does not have the level of professional training required for those working at forensic laboratories, and secondly, because he has no academic education in the *arts*. The excerpt proposes that an aesthetic evaluation on graffiti *as art* requires professional knowledge, thus graffiti is essentially a *style of its own*. The likelihood of an objective evaluation of graffiti styles is hence opposed as is not regarded as possible to approach art in general in objective terms. As suggested in the second court excerpt, it is therefore not possible to adopt an objective scientific approach when analyzing graffiti. The second excerpt moreover continues to point out that most often, the graffiti expert has only looked at photographs of the graffiti in question, and has not observed this in their “real” physical conditions. As such, the statement suggests that in order to understand graffiti, one should apprehend it in-situ.

In one of the courts in 2005, the defense actually invited a second graffiti expert to make a comment on writers’ individual styles: Tuomas Jääskeläinen, a journalist and graphic designer, and also one of the authors of the *Helsinki Graffiti* (1998) book. In this hearing, Jääskeläinen declared that it was dangerous to make any definite statements on individualized styles, because graffiti in general is about copying styles, and much of its aesthetics originates in earlier New York based subway art.

Let us wrap up this subsection with an overview of the court cases I have referred to and assess them as a whole. *Table 1* (on page 135) presents every single court decision on graffiti offences at the Helsinki Court of Appeal from 2000 to 2018³⁵.

³⁴ My emphasis.

³⁵ These court cases were sampled in 2018 by using the search word “graffiti” in the digital data base for Helsinki Court of Applied, which has digitalized all court decisions since 2000. Four court cases were excluded from a total amount of 28 cases, thus only 24 cases are presented in the table by the following motivation: Two cases in 2015 primary dealt with series of robbery and assault amongst groups of young males aged 17 - 19. Two individuals in these two different courts

Courts of Appeal do not automatically process all court cases held at the first level in district courts unless an appeal is made by one of the stakeholders. Normally such an appeal is made when any of the stakeholders, either the prosecuted, the injured party, or the prosecutor, is dissatisfied with the district court's decision. We can thus approach these court cases presented at the table as the 'tip' of the iceberg, as they do not include all the graffiti courts held at the district levels. At the same time, they should be recognized as the most controversial court cases dealing with graffiti in Finnish history and as a type of 'hard-end' case in the crime control system.

Table 1 present us with a vital fact: *only young men are prosecuted*. In all of these court cases, the prosecuted were young men aged between 17 and 35 years, with an average age of 23. As noted in the previous subchapter, the Finnish criminal justice system tends to be slow, thus the actual age at the time of the offending is, from case to case, perhaps two, or even five years earlier. For example, we could approach all the males in the table aged between 17 – 20 (which make them 34 % of all the prosecuted) as cases where the prosecuted had been at the time of the offending close to, if not under, 18 years old. Finland does not have a separate instance for juvenile courts, in contrast to many other European and Anglo-American countries. However, young offenders between the ages of 18 – 20 are convicted under a separate sentencing principle which grants greater access to milder sentences than adult offenders, such as community service (Lappi-Seppälä 2011). Underage offenders between the ages of 15 – 17 also fall under the jurisdiction of the criminal justice system, however the child welfare system is involved throughout the whole justice process, starting from the police investigation to the ensuing court hearing. Offenders between the ages of 15 – 17 are only sentenced to prison for exceptional reasons. An offender at the age of 15 - 17 can also be sentenced to a juvenile punishment if a fine is considered to be too 'soft' a consequence and when an unconditional imprisonment is too severe a sanction.

A significant number of the individuals (32%) present in Table 1 were given fines, which is the mildest punishment for criminal damage. However, the majority (45%)

were also accused for writing tags illegally, but these offences played a minor role in their respective courts. A third case in 2016 dealt with a male prosecuted who was accused for vandalizing an apartment with spray paint, and thus did not deal with graffiti in public space. The fourth excluded case from 2018 dealt primarily with assault, threat and drug possession, while graffiti vandalism played again a minor role in the whole case. All other cases presented in the table are primarily, or only dealing with the kind of graffiti that is related to the specific youth subculture researched in this thesis.

Table 1. Graffiti court decisions made at Helsinki Court of Appeal, 2000 – 2018.

<i>Year of Court decision</i>	<i>Gender of the prosecuted</i>	<i>Age of the prosecuted</i>	<i>Penalty decisions</i>	<i>Compensation claim in total*</i>	<i>Witness from a private security company</i>
2001	male	19	fine: 134 €**	877 €**	yes
2001	male	24	CI: 30 days	1 137 €**	yes
2002	male	18	JP: 8 months and 35 h youth service	10 722 €**	yes
2002	male male male	25 20 18	fine: 151 € ** fine: 94 € ** fine: 101 €**	2 374 €**	no
2002	male	25	UI: 50 days	362 €**	yes
2002	male male	18 25	CS: 30 h UI: 50 days	14 838 €**	yes
2003	male male	24 21	CI: 3 months CI: 60 days	2 622 €**	yes
2003	male male	20 21	CI: 60 days fine: 638 €	25 391 €	yes
2003	male	26	CI: 30 days	242 €**	yes
2005	male	20	fine 300 €	2000 €	yes
2005	male male male male	29 29 27 27	CI: 3 months CI: 13 months + fine 360 € CI: 3 months and 10 days UI: 1 year	34 766 €	yes
2005	male male	26 30	UI: 20 days CI: 30 days	1 969 €	yes
2006	male	18	fine 240 €	992 €	yes
2006	male	35	CI: 4 months	11 598 €	yes
2007	male	26	CI: 6 months	4 188 €	yes
2007	male	25	CI: 3 months	21 120 €	no
2007	male male male male	21 21 20 19	UI: 1 year, 4 months and 15 days CI: 75 days CI: 8 months CI: 7 months	42 333 €	yes
2009	male	17	CI: 80 days	8 349 €	yes
2010	male	22	CI: 6 months	10 187 €	yes
2010	male male	29 23	UC: 70 days fine: 360 €	994 €	yes
2010	male male	23 23	UC: 30 days fine: 800 €	845 €	yes
2010	male	17	fine: 420 €	1 289 €	yes
2011	male	18	fine: 420 €	7 887 €	yes
2013	male	33	fine: 480 €	1 003 €	yes
*Excludes rates of interest **Original amount in Finnish marks CI = Conditional imprisonment			CS = Community service JP = Juvenile punishment UI = Unconditional imprisonment		

were given conditional imprisonment and the third most frequent (18%) form of penalty was unconditional imprisonment. In Table 1, only one case is resulting in juvenile punishment and one to a community service. It is also clear that the amount of cases diminishes directly after the break from zero tolerance in 2008. Court proceedings between 2000 and 2008 represent 71% (17/24) of all cases, and if we include those cases that were processed between 2000 and 2010, this represents 92% (22/24) of all cases. The final graffiti-related court case at the presented period was in 2013.

It is also instructive to look at how many cases had a witness from a private security company – 22 out of 24 cases. A majority of these 22 cases concern the same guard described above, but not all of them. In 2010, the FPS no longer existed, as it became a part of another security company, *Turvatiimi*, which in 2016 was merged with another security company – *Avarn Security*. In Helsinki, this cluster of security companies has a specific role in the graffiti control machinery, operating first at a street level and then in the courts as witnesses against graffiti writers. In subcultural terms, these security companies symbolically embody what writers all over the world describe as the ‘vandal squad’ (see Austin 2001, 128 – 129; Macdonald 2002, 119 – 120). These are the specific units of guards or police that focus specifically on graffiti prevention. In Helsinki, graffiti writers, street artists, and other creative figures in the streets know the Finnish version of vandal squad by the nickname “fepsit”, sometimes also “fäpsit” or “fäbärit”. These nicknames refer originally to the security company FPS – and even if the company today no longer exists, these names are still deliberately used within the subcultural terminology to refer to any guard working specifically on graffiti prevention in Helsinki.

6.3 Habitual and occasional graffiti vandals

In the beginning of the Stop töhryille project, a representative of the National Council for Crime Prevention was concerned with the project’s social effects on graffiti writers. It was then stated by representatives of the project that mediation was offered to all graffiti writers at the Helsinki Mediation Office³⁶. The City Council

³⁶ Helsinki Mediation Office is publicly funded and a municipal institution. It provides mediation services as an alternative to criminal justice proceedings and is free of charge for citizens (http://www.sovittelutoiminta.fi/mita_sovittelu_on/in_english, 1.6.2020).

records that 420 graffiti writers were caught during the two first years of the project and in 60 cases mediation was used as an alternative proceeding to resolve these offenses (Helin 2014, 43). In 2001 the criteria for mediation became stricter and in the following years, only first-time offenders, and youth aged 14 – 17 were offered mediation (Brunila, et. al. 2011, 113 – 114). Thus, if officials from the Department for Urban Planning categorized a graffiti writer as a ‘habitual graffiti vandal’, then mediation for graffiti offences was precluded, even when a graffiti writer was underage, as in Karis’ case:

Kari: They told me I was a habitual graffiti vandal, so I could not go to mediation.

Malin: Would you have gone to if they let you?

Kari: Of course, I would have! But they wouldn’t let me.

In Chapter 3, the word ‘töhrý’ (graffiti vandalism) was described as a crucial concept for promoting graffiti as something ugly, illegal, and dangerous in Finnish graffiti debate. I also described how the agent noun ‘töhrijä’ (graffiti vandal) is an important word for signifying a person who commits graffiti vandalism in public space. From previous graffiti research, we know that publicly disseminated anti-graffiti rhetoric has been effective in promoting zero tolerance against graffiti (Austin 2001; Kimwall 2014). However, anti-graffiti rhetoric is not only effective in criminalizing graffiti and graffiti writers, but also for categorizing them into different levels of deviancy. As Cohen (1985) describes, ‘net widening’ control systems operate through the logic of professionalism and classification. This kind of classification system instantly creates a terminology that characterizes some groups as more criminal than others, and that is the case with the category of the ‘habitual graffiti vandal’. But what does this concept signify? Here is a definition offered in an article published 2002 by Finland’s second biggest media channel ‘MTV3’:

“Graffiti vandalism [‘töhrý’] can be divided into two subcategories: Occasional – and habitual graffiti vandalism. Usually it is easier to influence the occasional vandals; There is an ordinary bratty behavior in the background, which is possible to correct with rational speech, the liability of the compensation claim and at the latest few years on the back will stop the behaviour. The habitual graffiti vandal is a trickier case – the offenders are obviously older and clearly deranged. Keeping the city clean is actually more challenging the less graffiti vandalism there is, says the Stop töhrylle –

projects' leader Kauko Haantie: "Unrooting the habitual graffiti vandalism demands persistent and systematic work."³⁷

The 'habitual graffiti vandal' and the 'occasional graffiti vandal' are here translated from the Finnish words 'tapatöhrijä' and 'satunnaistöhrijä'. Habitual and occasional vandals are counter poles, one a more serious case and the other only sporadically vandalizing. The prefix-term 'tapa' in Finnish language means 'habit', thus the habitual graffiti vandal (tapatöhrijä) imagines an agency with obsession on graffiti, someone who has a compulsory habit to write graffiti. It also reminds of other Finnish concepts reflecting 'habitual offenders' and 'career criminals' (taparikollinen) or 'habitual substance users' (tapakäyttäjä). 'Tapa' describes an act as a permanent habit - acts such as graffiti writing, drug use or other deviant offences become pathologized and must be stopped. A habitual graffiti vandal is proposed as something different to those who would only on occasion write graffiti. Occasional graffiti vandals are characterized as younger and therefore, by age not mature enough to realize the offensive nature of their graffiti writing. However, if graffiti writing does not stop in "few years on the back", one is in risk of becoming a habitual graffiti vandal who is not only "older" but also "deranged" as stated in the article by MTV3.

It was often stated by officials involved in the Stop töhryille -project, that these habitual graffiti vandals were actually 'older men', rather than teenagers. Another information sheet presenting the Stop töhryille project in 2002 stated that a majority of habitual graffiti vandals are young men:

"In Helsinki there are about 3000 persons doing graffiti vandalism, a minority of them – 100-200 habitual graffiti vandals do 80 % of all the damage. They are held responsible for almost all graffiti vandalism and the biggest amount of the so-called markings, that is the tagging. A majority of them are 18-25 years old men."

Moreover, in an educational video produced in 1999 for the Stop töhryille project, spokesperson Mikko Virkamäki states that graffiti is not actually a "youth problem":

"It's about systematic vandalism amongst 100-200 friends. A majority of the tags and graffiti vandalism is made by men older than twenty. These nine, thirteen to fourteen ages, well there you of course have those who are just starting graffiti vandalism, because they heard at the youth house or somewhere that it is a cool thing and that

³⁷ MTV3 19.02.2002: "Stop töhryille Helsingissä" (<https://www.mtvuutiset.fi/artikkeli/stop-tohryille-helsingissa/3224936#gs.14eq4h>, 30.5.2020), my insertion.

should be tried. But it is really not a youth problem, and the Ministry of Education's Youth Barometer states that only one percent approves graffiti vandalism entirely. The same number of these youth support Neo-Nazi's." ³⁸

It may of course be true that youth in general do not agree with graffiti vandalism, and it is also likely that only a minority of young people are interested in graffiti. Nevertheless, it is more interesting that there is a connotation made between youths' perspectives on graffiti and Neo-Nazis. The attempt of this connotation is to present graffiti negatively by comparing its popularity to white-supremacist youth movements. This connotation is, as it stands, both peculiar and irrelevant, and from the perspective of the graffiti subculture it is bizarre given the fact that graffiti originates in a multi-ethnic youth subculture often supporting anti-racism. It is also noteworthy that representatives for the Stop töhryille project rarely referred explicitly to research reports to support a stand on zero tolerance, outside the few times this specific survey, the Youth Barometer³⁹, was mentioned. It is most likely that Virkamäki refers to the Youth Barometer⁴⁰ published in 1998, as it also happens to report a low level of support for Neo-Nazis. In this barometer, one survey question asks, "Is it ok to write political graffiti on the walls of buildings?". Results from this study concluded that only 1% responding positively, while 96% opposed this statement. In a subsequent Youth Barometer⁴¹ published in 1999, the somewhat misleading term 'political graffiti' was removed, and the question in the survey now asks whether "Graffiti and the vandalizing of public buildings is an expression of youth creativity?". In this report, 23% agreed with the statement.

It took a further decade before graffiti was mentioned again in the Finnish Youth Barometer. This was during the same time period that the Stop töhryille project was ongoing. In 2009, the Youth Barometer focus on youth's cultural interests and introduced several surveying opinions on graffiti, such as "Graffiti practitioners should have legal places to paint graffiti on" and "Graffiti is art and not a crime"

³⁸ Siisti Stadi -opetusvideo (1999) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Y3Z29PWv7Q&t=151s>, 30.5.2020).

³⁹ The annual 'Youth Barometer' surveys opinions among youth aged 15 - 29 and is published by the State Youth Council (<https://tietoanuorista.fi/nuorisobarometri/>, 31.5.2020).

⁴⁰ Saarela, Pekka: Nuorisobarometri 2/1998 (https://tietoanuorista.fi/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Nuorisobarometri_2-98.pdf, 31.5.2020).

⁴¹ Saarela, Pekka: Nuorisobarometri 2/1999 (https://tietoanuorista.fi/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Nuorisobarometri_2-99.pdf, 31.5.2020).

(Myllyniemi 2009). This was the same year that Helsinki municipality launched the first legal graffiti walls.

The habitual graffiti vandal is actually not a well-established concept and seldom appears in mass media reporting. When it does, it is usually used in the form of quotations from leaders of the Stop töhrylle project. The term is also utilized when describing graffiti vandalism as a public problem for the city:

“The Department for Urban Planning has developed the term habitual graffiti vandal. According to the Department, a majority of the habitual graffiti vandals live in Kallio. Habitual graffiti vandals from other parts of the city also visit the restaurants in Kallio. “Habitual graffiti vandals are adult men, who vandalize walls, urban constructions, buses and anything just for fun and without any motive” Nygrén explains. According to Nygrén, vandalistic graffiti is no longer a problem of the youth, but is a hobby of men in their nearly thirties. Because of the habitual graffiti vandals, the Department of Urban Planning is unable to keep the district clean despite a normally functioning continuous surveillance and graffiti removal.”⁴²

The article quoted above, entitled, “Today ‘habitual graffiti vandals’ are adult men” was published in the leading daily newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat* in 2007. In this article, Kauko Nygrén, as a representative for the Stop töhrylle project, describes habitual graffiti vandalism again as a problem that may be traced to adult men, who only do it for “fun and without any motive”. But he also relates the problem to a specific district in Helsinki, where the habitual graffiti vandals “live”. The article states that the Department for Urban Planning needs extended funding of €400,000 to keep the districts of Kallio and Alppiharju graffiti free. Kallio and Alppiharju are the downtown districts in Helsinki, inhabited by a young population, with a considerable active night life, in comparison with for example the nearby district Pasila. Kallio in particular features many cheap pubs and is considered to be the root for Helsinki’s alternative scenes. It is frequented by young people that are interested in urban culture.

After the break from zero tolerance and during the launch of legal graffiti walls in Helsinki, another article in *Helsingin Sanomat* featured the headline, “Graffiti returned to Helsinki – Helsinki City is no longer hunting graffiti writers as it used

⁴² HS 20.2.2007: ””Tapatöhrijät” ovat nykyään aikuisia miehiä”(https://www.hs.fi/kaupunki/art-2000004462699.html, 25.6.2020).

to”⁴³. This article takes a wholly different stand, and describes the city’s need for legal graffiti walls. The former head of the zero tolerance project was also interviewed, and despite Kauko Nygrén seeming to approach the new graffiti policy in positive ways, he inserts; “We will know what the outcome is after several years. Will we have new habitual graffiti vandals?”. My interpretation of this statement, and as a conclusion to the reflections above, is that the term ‘habitual graffiti vandal’ seems to be used in relation to a particular generation of male graffiti writers who lived in Helsinki during zero tolerance. The term ‘habitual graffiti vandal’ was developed alongside the terminology used by the Stop töhryille project and in relation to a municipal institution, which has had a dramatic impact on graffiti writers’ right to mediation as an alternative to criminal court proceedings. However, it is empirically unclear how one actually becomes categorized as a habitual graffiti vandal, or who these decisions are made by. In any case, according to the graffiti writers’, it was not a process that they were themselves involved in. Nevertheless, the term ‘tapatöhrijä’ did develop a subcultural meaning, as it eventually became a motif and is still visible in ironic expressions in graffiti paintings.

6.4 The culmination of rage on the streets

Peace will not be in the hoods or in the city before vandal squad fucks off lurking in the bushes!

- Jontti & Shaka (2006)⁴⁴

“In some sense there is a continuing struggle by young people to take possession of the street as their own space, whilst much policing is aimed at reclaiming what is perceived as public space. It is therefore no surprise to see young people defending the street, which often becomes the place where the battle takes place.”

– Mike Presdee (2000, 138 – 139)

So far, in this chapter, I have reflected upon the crime control on graffiti in Helsinki in forms of law, punishment, and the institutionally developed categorizations of

⁴³ HS 9.8.2010: “Graffitit palasivat Helsinkiin. Helsingin kaupunki ei jahtaa entiseen malliin graffitimaalareita” (<https://www.hs.fi/kaupunki/art-2000004748378.html>, 25.6.2020).

⁴⁴ My translation of the rap lyrics in ”Vittuun koko sakki”, a song performed by the artist duo Jontti & Shaka. Original lyrics states: ”Rauha ei tuu vallitseeseen lähiöissä eikä Stadissa, ennen ku vandal squad painuu vittuun lurkkimast puskista!”. For more information, see further in this chapter and the Figure 9.

deviant graffiti writers. This control system and its effects has mainly impacted upon the traumatic experience for graffiti writers belonging to the zero tolerance generation. This narration has mirrored the process of labelling, and hence has reflected less on the active agency of graffiti writers. I will now move on to conclude this chapter with an account of the fall of zero tolerance and how graffiti writers themselves were an active part of this process. It will also point out how street art, in forms of sticker art, was part of the active resistance against zero tolerance policy.

The battle between graffiti writers and controlling authorities has also had another effect – the composition of a youth rage on the streets. ‘Rage’ is, as elsewhere noted, a powerful strategy for expressing the rhetoric of the oppressed because it often bursts out unexpectedly in imaginative and creative ways, while simultaneously attracting an audience to rationalize the act – often in terms of ‘justice’ (Halberstam 1993; Katz 1988; Presdee 2000). I will reflect upon the final four years of the Stop töhryille project as this era marks a significant period for a change and the beginning of a new time period in Helsinki’s graffiti history. It is marked by graffiti writers, street artists, urban activists and their supporters mobilizing to resist zero tolerance on a street level, and through several civic events and demonstrations that occurred in the city center during the period 2004 - 2008. This period was significant for a chain of events which came to collectivize Helsinki’s graffiti subculture and for establishing a united struggle against the controlling authorities which had marginalized urban creativity in the city.

A particular incident in 2004 triggered a mobilization of resistance against the zero tolerance policy in the city. One night in October 2004 police arrested six young people suspected of pasting thousands of stickers the size of a match box stating “let me love” and “no hope for the kids” in the city center⁴⁵. These stickers were everywhere and for many years after this incident one was still able to spot them on Helsinki’s streets. Police performed a house search on the arrested, and imprisoned the young people for two days. One of the suspects, an art student, wrote a blog post directly after being released. The person disclosed that they had apparently been filmed and followed by FPS guards, who had conducted a 50-page long report for

⁴⁵ HS 20.10.2004: “Poliisi pidätti tarrojen ja kaakeleiden liimaajat” [The police arrests for pasting stickers and ceramics] (<https://www.hs.fi/kaupunki/art-2000004260548.html>, 3.6.2020)

the police on their case⁴⁶. A public debate began on the sticker bombers' case on the pages of *Helsingin Sanomat*, which saw journalists, as well a Detective Chief Inspector, and a Principal of the Academy of Fine Arts taking part⁴⁷. The debate mainly considered the proportionality of the sanctions and the value of street art. Only one week after the arrests, 400 protestors gathered in front of the contemporary art museum *Kiasma* for the event *Reclaim The City – Action for Street Art*. A police car surveilling the event was covered by protestors' stickers and protestors were encouraged to join together against the zero tolerance policy in the city:

“Professional artists keep your grants, galleries and ateliers, your champagne glass and exhibition invitations. We don't need a degree in arts, nor the opinions of art historians or experts on new style trends. Walls, fences, feeder pillars and street lanterns are our galleries, our event calendars and guest books. (...) STOP ‘STOP TÖHRYILLE’ – STOP FPS! STOP THE GREY CONCRETE FASCISM!”⁴⁸

Control agencies and cultural institutions were both considered to be outsiders to this subculture, as they were engaging in the evaluation of graffiti and street art from ‘above’. The statement above is a direct attack against all institutions that attempt to define the value of graffiti and street art on an authoritative level. Instead, as the quote says, protestors advocated a street-level approach to bring their message out. Additionally, this protest happened to be organized exactly the same time as the three young men, two 17-year old and one 18-year old, were in pretrial custody, suspected of series of acts graffiti vandalism.

Two years later, on the 1st May 2006, the *EuroMayDay* event attracted nearly 1500 young demonstrators to protest against the precarious conditions and social deprivation of youth in the city. A significant number of the demonstrators were

⁴⁶ ”Katutaitelijan tunnustuksia: Vangittuna 56 tuntia tarrojen liimaamisesta” [A street artists confession: Arrested 56 hours for pasting stickers] (<https://www.valtaus.squat.net/tunnustuksia.html>, 3.6.2020).

⁴⁷ HS 26.10.2004: ”Tarrojen liimaajien pidätys taisi olla ylilyönti” [An overkill to arrest sticker posters] (<https://www.hs.fi/mielipide/art-2000004262228.html>, 3.6.2020),

HS 5.11.2004: ”Kaupunkitaide pyrkii vuorovaikutukseen” [Urban art aims for interaction] (<https://www.hs.fi/mielipide/art-2000004264681.html>, 3.6.2020),

HS 9.11.2004: ”Poliisi tutkii rikoksia eikä arvioi taiteellisuutta” [Police investigates crime and not the evaluation of art] (<https://www.hs.fi/mielipide/art-2000004265394.html>, 3.6.2020).

⁴⁸ Megafoni 11.12.2004: ”RTC katutaiteen puolesta, Helsingissä 5.11.2004” [RTC action for street art in Helsinki 5.11.2004] (<https://megafoni.kulma.net/index.php?art=230>, 3.6.2020).

graffiti writers, street artists and sympathizers with urban subcultures. I was also there, and I remember well how at the front line of the demonstration the crowd continuously shouted, “FPS is shit!” Police later stated that there was a ‘heated atmosphere’ at the demonstration and the media reported that the participants vandalized and tagged in the city center during the demonstration, causing more than €10,000 in damage. The after party of the demonstration squatted an old warehouse of VR (railway company), which was situated near the central railway station and symbolically also in front of the State Parliament. Protestors were making themselves at home at the old warehouse, and someone sprayed “Fuck zero tolerance” on one of the billboards in front of the warehouse. In the early hours of the next morning, the event turned into a conflict between youth and the police and firemen who were called in to extinguish a bonfire at the party. Firemen accused protestors of attempting to stop them. Consequently, the whole event unexpectedly became one of the biggest riots in Finland in the post-war period, and as the warehouse was mysteriously burned down one week later, it accelerated the massive media attention on the whole topic for a substantial period.

A hot topic for the media was the mysterious Molotov cocktails thrown into the bonfire, and which the police, at first, held up as an evidence for a preorganized riot. The Chief Inspector of the fire department a week later described on a TV-talk show how someone “foolish” was throwing Molotov cocktails into the bonfire and they were all dangerously exploding, though he was not sure what they were made of⁴⁹. Now, fourteen years since, I want to disclose a fact: some of those Molotov cocktails everyone was so keen to know about were actually spray cans. I saw graffiti writers throwing their empty spray cans into the fire and how they instantly exploded and caused the sound the Chief Inspector described. These spray cans were not ‘preorganized’ for an intended riot, they were just the tools that graffiti writers normally carry when they go out.

EuroMayDay 2006 was a liberating moment for many graffiti writers in the city, and a brilliant moment for generating anger and rage against zero tolerance. The energy that erupted there was powerful and it was magnified by breaking windows, yelling the statements about the FPS, tagging in the streets, and by exploding empty spray cans as a final ritual for a carnivalistic expression of rage. The police had underestimated their sources for controlling the event and were ‘only’ able to

⁴⁹ ”Makasiininen vappumellakka 2006 – A-talk” [1st May riot at warehouse – A-talk] (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4RrxexdfiK8>, 2.9.2020)

apprehend 17 people. However, the security company FPS was also at the demonstration, and they managed to covertly film many of the writers tagging the streets, ending up that some were prosecuted for the damage. Nevertheless, as Presdee (2000) would note, this was a moment when irrational laughter was heard and carnivalism on the streets arose. That is because carnivalism “functions as a playful and pleasurable revolution, where those normally excluded from the discourse of power may lift their voices in anger and celebration” (Presdee 2000, 42).

Similar public events in the city started to attract crowds of graffiti writers, perhaps because protesters offered a moment for mocking hierarchical structures of street control. This was also noted by the graffiti police in the city. It was nothing unexpected for graffiti writers, rather it only caused an opportunity to meet the graffiti police outside the ‘fortress of control’, the courts and police stations, and in the graffiti writers’ own milieu, on the streets. Here it was much easier to disrupt their authority in front of others. I remember one of the events:

“We had agreed to meet up near the central railway station, in the back yard of Kiasma, the contemporary museum of arts. Tonight, was the yearly Night of Arts, the night when people gathered to enjoy culture and performances organized in the downtown of Helsinki. We were on our way to a demonstration called ‘The Night of Street Art’. Some of the guys opened their backpacks, they were full of beer packs and still cold – newly shoplifted from the City market in the bottom floor of the nearby shopping mall Forum. They generously pulled out a beer for everyone and we were laughing out loud, enthusiastically waiting for the demonstration to begin. But then, the graffiti police arrived – three men in civil clothes. They quickly surrounded us and started to search our bags. I was nervous when I saw how one of my friends became all white in his face, and I hoped he had nothing too serious in his bag. Eventually the police found spray cans in his bag and he was taken to the police station. The passing ‘ordinary’ people were staring at us and Jani yelled to their fear: “Look! This is what criminals look like!”. We laughed out loudly again.” (memorial field note, 2016)

Laughter is a powerful way to destroy the respect of those who act as superior, and is most effective among those with least power (Presdee 2000, 40). The event that my memorial field note refers to was the *Night of Street Art* in 2006 that I took part in with some graffiti writers. It was organized as a shadow event of the annual festival, *Night of the Arts* – that still yearly presents art-related events held everywhere in many cities of Finland, usually in August. The invitation for the Night of Street Art said:

“Are you tired of that hype and those lies that water down the mass media news about graffiti culture? About, that no one understands, that graffiti is also art, but always whining about how places with graffiti are dangerous and no one wants to go there because you’re ending up as victim for crime? So are we.”⁵⁰

This event gathered about 200 protestors to demonstrate against the city’s zero tolerance policy and again graffiti writers and street artists used the creative weapons at their disposal: tags, stencils and stickers were employed to actively decorate the streets the protestors marched through. The alternative media *Megafoni* conducted a photo report on the event, and one of the pictures shows how a police car was decorated with heart-shaped stickers – a symbol that in powerful ways parodied the violence represented by control authorities. Two of the photos depict tags screaming ‘HELP’ bombed on a trash bin and along an escalator. However, this time the police had apparently learned from their mistakes at the EuroMayDay event and were better equipped. Some of us were detained already before the event started, and by the end of the demonstration 50 protestors were apprehended when riot police encircled the demonstration at Simonkatu-street in the city center⁵¹.

Eventually, both FPS and the Stop töhryille project became more debated in the national press and graffiti writers started to win alliances in defending their side of the battle. The zero tolerance project was candidly criticized by alternative media, such as *Voima*, and by local activists and politicians of the Left Alliance, such as Paavo Arhinmäki, who was himself a graffiti writer. Arhinmäki, with a coalition of mainly leftist politicians, publicly defended graffiti writers’ right to city space and several times made a pledge at the city council to terminate the project, as well as to open municipal funded graffiti walls (Helin 2014, 46). Arhinmäki was highly popular among graffiti writers because of his defensive work for graffiti, and it is likely that the support of graffiti writers contributed to Arhinmäki becoming elected in 2007 as a member of the state parliament. A few years later, Arhinmäki became the Minister for Culture and Sport, and many writers understood this as a symbolic sign of victory in the long-standing graffiti war.

⁵⁰ Megafoni 1.9.2006: ”Katutaiteiden yö Helsingissä 24.8.2006” [Night of street arts in Helsinki 24.8.2006] (<https://megafoni.kulma.net/index.php?art=368&am=1>, 2.6.2020).

⁵¹ HS 25.8.2006: ”Taiteiden yö muuttui loppuillasta rähinöinniksi” [The night of arts escalated into rowdyism] (<https://www.hs.fi/kaupunki/art-2000004420309.html>, 4.6.2020)

Another key moment in the debate on zero tolerance, was in June 2006, when *Helsingin Sanomat* published an extensive report on the “graffiti war” in Helsinki⁵². This report was one of the only mass media articles that, during the life of the project, took an active stance in presenting graffiti writers’ perspective:

“Graffiti writers state that FPS is overkilling and breaks the law. ‘On first May, those who were messing around, breaking things and vandalizing were those who are tired of FPS and their tyrannical power’, says 19-year old Arto. He was also there. ‘No company does like this. They have beaten my friends.’ says Arto. He too, has experience of guard violence. ‘If you make a report on guard violence, well who do you believe: The writer or three security guards?’ asks another writer, nearly thirty years old Martti.”

During the final years of the project, zero tolerance was criticized intensively, and the culmination of rage was accelerated on a street-level. Graffiti writers and street artists held the FPS company responsible for their economic and social deprivation, whilst accusing the company of violent and unethical covert surveillance methods. Graffiti writers recognized the security company as their biggest enemy – more so than any other control institution – because no other agent of the zero tolerance project had targeted them as zealously as the FPS guards did. Counterintuitively, this battle also personalized the relationship between writers and guards, who often knew each other by their actual names (Publication I, p. 304). Graffiti, tags and stickers were the finest weapon graffiti writers had against this control industry, and for them were a means to collectively harness a powerful discourse in the fight against the security company. It is therefore no coincidence that the city’s writers begun to write inflammatory phrases such as, “Fuck FPS”, “FPS 100% shit” and even controversial statements, such as “Lokka is a pedophile” wherever they went to paint graffiti pieces or tag in the streets.

The proliferation of a variety of anti-FPS stickers became probably the most successful tool for writers to disgrace the guards, often by using images of the guards themselves. These were not only widespread on the streets, but on photo-sharing websites dedicated to anti-FPS stickers. Many of these stickers employed a strategy which street art scholars term ‘culture jamming’, ‘adbusting’ or ‘subvertising’, which is a method by clandestine protestors to alter the images and the slogans of a

⁵² HS 4.6.2006: “Graffitisota puhkesi Ilmalan varikolla” [Graffiti war breaks out at Ilmala railyard] (<https://www.hs.fi/kaupunki/art-2000004401632.html>, 4.6.2020)

corporation to accomplish them as satiric and parodic messages in urban space (Klein 2000; Ross 2017, 7). One digitally driven photo pool, still available online at Flickr.com, is titled “fpsecurity” and presents a number of anti-FPS stickers⁵³. Many of the stickers were handmade and small in their size, but nevertheless significantly occupying space in the city (see Figure 10.). For example, one sticker shows an FPS-guard – a white man with a shaved head posing a Nazi-heil towards the photographer – accompanied with the phrase “Lokka Jugend” (see Figure 7.). This sticker presenting FPS guard as a racist white man was one of the most widely spread in the city of Helsinki in 2007. Another sticker presents a guard with the text “Wanted – Dead or Alive” (see Figure 8.) and a third with the text, “Homolokka” and “Federal Pedofile Service” (see Figure 9.), which misleadingly conflates homosexuality with pedophilia.

The symbolics employed in these stickers contain vital information about the dominant gender discourse at the time in the graffiti subculture. Some of these stickers clearly invoke homophobic connotations illogically justified by the accusation of pedophilia. Indeed, by labelling the enemy’s sexuality as deviant, the stickers operate on a discourse that takes the writers’ hetero-masculinity as granted, and as a norm for this subcultural way of urban life. Moreover, mocking the enemy by labelling his/her sexuality as deviant is perhaps one of the most normative ways for subordinated men to express a lack of power, which is common in young male dominated street subcultures (Messerschmidt 1993). Gender as well as sexuality may be read as a series of disembodied performances on the streets that signifies *space* (Halberstam 2005), yet they also construct a narrative of an idealized gender identity. The style these stickers take offers an inverted mirror to young and subordinated male graffiti writers, with a traumatic sense of brutal control in the city. Think about the three labels that are used as rhetorical strategies against control and to mark graffiti writers’ heterosexuality as a ‘right’ sexuality on the streets: first, *the panic of homosexuality*, referring to male guards’ desire to hunt male writers. Second, *the accusation of pedophilia*, which targets adult guards’ desire to seek kids on the streets, and third, *claiming control as fascist*, which mocks the guards’ desire for an authoritarian colorless order in the city. These symbols highlight a local type of graffiti masculinity at a given time. They illustrate both the impulses of homophobic and anti-fascist

⁵³ Flickr.com photo pool “fpsecurity” (<https://www.flickr.com/groups/534777@N24/pool/>, 24.3.2021). A number of photos available at this photo pool are republished under creative commons and with the permission of photographers.

Figure 7. Sticker in Helsinki, 2007. Copyright "stickerHelsinki documentation project" at Flickr.com.



Figure 9. Sticker in Mikkeli, 2008. Copyright "sanaseppo" at Flickr.com.



Figure 8. Sticker in Helsinki, 2007. Copyright "mr.box O" at Flickr.com.



Figure 10. Sticker in Helsinki, 2007. Copyright "stickerHelsinki documenation project" at Flickr.com.



Figure 11. Fuck FPS -banderole at EuroMayDay -event in Helsinki, 2008. Copyright "Luusonen" at Flickr.com.



male masculinity, a mixture of two different political philosophies that are oddly coupled in the expression of graffiti masculinity.

The critique of zero tolerance was also raised in other subcultural representations, including music that spoke directly to young male graffiti writers. In 2004, *3rd Rail Music*, a Finnish underground rap record label was established. It had a name that graffiti writers associated with the ‘virtual’ dangers when painting metro systems. In March 2006, the record label released the EP *Vittuun koko sakki* (“Fuck off ‘sakki’⁵⁴), by *Jontti & Shaka*, a Helsinki-based rap duo. Their debut album epitomized the young subversive masculine critique of zero tolerance politics against graffiti in Helsinki. The album was dedicated to issues including what it is like to be an urban male outcast in Helsinki, bombing and messing around on the streets of Kallio and Sörnäinen. It strongly portrays the misery of young poor men’s alcohol problems and their fight for their livelihood, while raising critical standpoints against mass media representations of the social problems experienced by youth. Yet, the main message of the whole album is depicted in the cover image. It illustrates a well-known anti-Nazi symbol throwing a swastika into the trash, albeit the swastika was replaced by the initials of FPS (see Figure 12.). This cover image was also originally a sticker well spread on the streets of Helsinki.

While many of the lyrics on the album defame FPS in parodic ways, the intro and the outro skits on the album adopt a more sharp strategy, via a voiced impersonation of an employee of FPS. The ‘employee’ cries out his trauma over the molestation and homoerotic behavior he has witnessed among his work mates during a night shift. The crying voice describes how the other guards ask him if he has a ‘boner’ while they lay down together in the bush waiting for a ‘catch’. Finally, the outro skit finishes the narrative with the same voice describing his colleagues’ intoxicated and deviant

Figure 12. *Vittuun koko sakki!* -album by Jontti & Shaka, 2006. Republished with permission. Copyright Jontti & Shaka and 3rd Rail Records.



⁵⁴ Sakki is an old slang word, which means a group of people. In the lyrics of this EP this word is meant to reflect the whole group of control authorities that represented zero tolerance in Helsinki at the time.

behavior at an employees' sauna night. When they get drunk, they start to hug each other, much to the fear and horror of the narrator. This narrative presents as a direct attack on the guards' sexual reputation in a very similar way to those of the anti-FPS stickers.

Perhaps the most powerful expression of rage is heard in the lyrics of the first track on the EP⁵⁵. This rap song expresses an absolute hatred of the whole machinery of the control system against graffiti writers, from the security company to media framings. The lyrics scream violent threats designed to offend the leading figures of the Stop töhryille project. In particular, it manifests graffiti writers' fury against the leading figure of FPS with the first sequence as follows:

be aware of this man
how much do we have to tolerate?
shit will this ever stop?
bullshit that graffiti-problem
needs rent-a-cops at every corner
cruel that ordinaries don't understand
that their taxes are burnt
on that devil warhead's salary
that bastard's foot should be tied
amateur cops FPS
beating small boys
what steroid fags the city sponsors
and the jury faithfully swallows
all the crap
like a fucking bigot with an
apocryphal prophetic
fuck off you all
lokka and the perjury
fits well together as
gestapo boy's peaked cap
the crowd is jailed
for longer than rapists
you raped a tram not a woman
you caused feelings of insecurity,
check this piss me off
it crossed the edge for
one hundred fucking percent

varokaa tätä miestä
miten paljon pitää sietää?
paska loppuiks tää koskaan?
roskaa et graffitiongelma
vaatii stigun joka kulmaan
julmaa ettei tavis tajuu
et sen verorahat palaa
sen saatanan sotasiilin palkkaan
pallo jalkaan sille äpärälle pitäs pukkaa
amatöörikytät fepsit
pieksee pikkupoikia
moisii hormoonihomoja stadi sponssaa
ja dumarit nielee
tosissaan kaiken ton roskan
niinku vittumainen hihhuli
hämäräperäisen profetian
vittuun koko sakki!
lokka ja väärä vala
natsaa yhteen niinku
gestapopojan koppelakki
popula lusii
enemmän ku raiskari
raiskasit sporan etkä naisen
aiheutit turvattomuuden tunnetta
tsekatkaa vitutusta
pursuu yli äyräiden
hevonvitun sataprocenttista

⁵⁵ Vittuun koko sakki (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=08JAdRHsEUE>, 4.6.2020).

The male subject in the lyrics is strongly marked by a heteronormative discourse that is similar to that of the anti-FPS stickers, and again uses pedophilia to justify a homophobic rhetoric by characterizing guards as child molesting “steroid fags”, “beating small boys”. Further, the rhetoric’s of graffiti writers’ heterosexuality is emphasized in the lines that exemplifies unfair criminal justice – ‘raping’ (to destroy a place by tagging) a tram results in harsher sentences than what sex offenders get.

When I took up the issue of homophobic discourses used in the subcultural scene to critique zero tolerance with an ageing graffiti writer, he replied “It was something that people did because they were too young to understand what it meant. You know, we don’t do that anymore.”. In the last years of field work I rarely heard anyone verbally doing so-called gay bashing, though I would state this as typically common for young male writers in Helsinki fifteen years ago. In an e-mail sent in 2020, I asked *Shaka* to reflect on the gender perspectives on their old debut EP:

”Our rap from this period is quite strange from a gender perspective. Women are perhaps not objectified, like rap-lyrics often do. But in the world of *Vittuun koko sakki* women seems to be absent, nor are there any other gender identities present. At the gigs there were mainly young men, who were all united by their rage against the leaders of the Stop töhryille -campaign, such as Mikko Virkamäki and Petri Lokka.”

This EP certainly became a hit among many male graffiti writers in Helsinki during the late period of zero tolerance. I remember well how the first track on the EP invoked people to dance and sing along, often sparking mayhem at house parties in the suburbs, in public parks during warm summer nights, or at the gigs in dark local pubs. Young males at the front raised their middle fingers in the air during the chorus “Fuck off you all, say it again! So, we won’t forget who is hated here! Cops are a minor harm, but Lokka goddamit!”. It is easy to remember these moments, because the rage was as true as the experience of control brutality the lyrics were capturing – it was about real life among young heterosexual men burning for graffiti in Helsinki during a zero tolerance period. But there was something else which also marked these carnivalistic moments – the young men’s traumatic feelings that were shared in these moments gave rise to a sense of compassion, brotherhood, and of belonging together. There was, however, not much space for non-heterosexuals and

women to participate, unless they had their own experience of FPS or police brutality to share.

To conclude this chapter, let us briefly note the role of the public protest that framed the final critique against the zero tolerance project, just before it was terminated in 2008. At this time, the leaders for the Stop Töhrville project had decided to organize a ten-year anniversary event at Finlandia Hall. In the meantime, 500 protestors gathered in front of the contemporary art museum Kiasma for the counter event named TöhrFest. As an act of direct disobedience against the city's zero tolerance policy, a provisional wall was set up for graffiti writers to paint on and the left politician Arhinmäki gave a speech from a truck platform that was decorated with banners stating "FUCK FPS". Yet, what was perhaps the most symbolically powerful act for the graffiti writers themselves, was that the crowd of protestors paraded away from Kiasma with a banner stating "Let's not celebrate shit! 10 years too much! STOP ZERO TOLERANCE" through the city center to reclaim the square of Sörnäinen. Marching away from Kiasma, an official institution of culture in the city center, to squat a place where graffiti writers at the time were perhaps more comfortable, can be read as a geographical act of class performance. The square of Sörnäinen is in vernacular language known as the "speed square". It is considered to be a historic working class district, and represents the cradle of street subcultures in Helsinki. From a geo-historic perspective, Helsinki was once split by "the long bridge" – a bridge between the city center and Hakaniemi connecting with Sörnäinen, which previously divided the rich bourgeois in the south from the poor working class in the north (Waris 2016). The parade between Kiasma and Sörnäinen also reflects an age-related shift between day and night; a sophisticated and safe adult time in broad daylight turns into a savaged youth space at the time of the nightfall when the protesters arrived to Sörnäinen. It was at the speed square that protestors began to be arrested and harassed by the police and things turned into a menace. By looking at the atmosphere in videos of the protests in these two very different civic spaces, one can see a clear difference between the events: a peaceful family event at Kiasma, versus an increasing amount of police officers surrounding the protestors at Sörnäinen⁵⁶. The arrests at the speed square started at the same moment when Jontti & Shaka sparked off the gig with the celebrated rap-song "Vittuun koko sakki"

⁵⁶ Civic videos depicting the TöhrFest at Kiasma (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=302GuzoUqy8>, 4.6.2020) and Sörnäinen square (<https://vimeo.com/1818908>, 4.6.2020).

while the crowd cheered. Police later stated that 1500 tags were written along the parade route and they arrested 27 protestors⁵⁷.

It is evident that much of the crime control on graffiti writers during this time was generated by police institutions. However, it is likely that the anti-graffiti project Stop töhrylle would not have been so powerful against graffiti writers without the public support and the outsourced crime prevention company FPS. David Garland (2001, 17) writes that one of the most interesting features of modern crime control is that it has blurred the distinctions between the private and the public, and has extended “the contours of officially co-ordinated crime control well beyond the institutional boundaries of ‘the state’”. In a similar approach, Kimwall (2014, 137) reflects upon the rise of a specific anti-graffiti industry as a part of the broader socio-economic transformation known as the new public management. The expansion of a private security industry is a clear example of how crime control has become commercialized and de-centralized from a state monopoly, even in Finland (Koskela 2009). In Finland, young people’s trust in the police is generally stronger than in private security guards (Saarikkomäki 2017), and this seems to apply for the experience of Helsinki-based graffiti writers. Graffiti writers’ experiences of the security guard’s expertise as crime specialists in court rooms was in particularly approached as a negative outcome of the zero tolerance policy. Indeed, as we have seen, the longstanding and determined efforts of both private agents, police work and municipal policy eventually gave rise to a deep masculine rage on the streets, often in heteronormative and homophobic terms. This would leave a mark on the Helsinki graffiti subculture for a long period.

⁵⁷ HS 19.9.2008: “Graffitimarssi jätti jälkensä 1500 töhryä Helsingissä” [Graffiti march left 1500 tags in Helsinki] (<https://www.hs.fi/kaupunki/art-2000004599257.html>, 4.6.2020).

7 IMAGINING GENDER IN HELSINKI GRAFFITI

Three days after the TöhrFest in September 2008, the deputy mayor of Helsinki announced that now was the time for the city to evaluate a new graffiti policy. Two months later the city council adopted a new policy, which considered graffiti as an art form and as part of the city's urban culture (Helin 2014, 48). The Stop töhrylle project was finally closed in 31st December 2008. In May 2009, a 100-meter-long public graffiti wall was launched in Suvilahti, and the next year additional graffiti walls were established on the several hundred meters of plywood fences surrounding a large construction area nearby in Kalasatama. In 2013, the number of municipally funded graffiti walls, free to use by anyone, across the different city districts, extended to eight in total. And, in 2017, nearly ten years after the repeal of zero-tolerance, a powerful symbolic revenge for graffiti supporters involved the repainting of two previously removed graffiti murals at Kulosaari metro station and Malminkartano train station (see Chapter 3). The two new murals were repainted in a co-operation between the Youth Department and different artists, some of whom were the same artists involved in the initial murals painted in 1991 (Kulosaari mural) and 1995 (Malminkartano train station).

The first ten years after the break from zero tolerance policy could be described as a period for establishing a pedagogical approach to graffiti as a mundane art form and the institutionalization of graffiti as an art form. Helsinki has gradually increased its focus on legal forms of graffiti and street art, and a whole industry of cultural institutions and street art organizations have supported the popularization of an urban, 'hip' and trendy culture constructed around and about graffiti and street art. The city's Youth Department and its own Street Art Bureau *Supafly* have actively engaged in legal forms of graffiti and have continuously organized art projects and workshops for interested youth. Also, many of Helsinki's prestigious museums and galleries have organized graffiti related exhibitions, for example the exhibition *Graffiti* at Helsinki Art Museum⁵⁸, and the solo-exhibition by the Helsinki-based graffiti artist

⁵⁸ Exhibition "Graffiti", 6.4.-9.9.2018 (<https://www.hamhelsinki.fi/en/exhibition/graffiti/>, 1.7.2020).

Egs at Kunsthalle, both in 2018. The same year, Finland became the first country in the world to publish postage stamps presenting graffiti, featuring work by *Egs*.

In 2020, the urban realm in the city is very different than it was fifteen years ago, and if graffiti was back then considered as a deviant subculture, today it has expanded to cover fields of popular culture beyond an ageing crowd of graffiti writers. New generations of graffiti writers and street artists have emerged, and with their contributions the city's image has certainly been altered from the dark period of zero tolerance. Nevertheless, much of the early as well as the majority of contemporary graffiti in Helsinki is often attributed to a male-norm under the grand narrative of zero tolerance. This masculine image of Helsinki graffiti was generated during the period of zero tolerance, which is often described as the acid test for the local graffiti subculture's essence. Zero tolerance is often presented via a warfare narrative, as a challenging period which Helsinki graffiti survived through, and which is now regarded as a proof for that nothing can eliminate the city's graffiti scene. Hence, there is constant discussion about the time before and after zero tolerance, and this is frequently repeated in both public debates, as well in subcultural archives and medias (Publication I, Publication II, Publication III). This subcultural storytelling focuses on zero tolerance, and on those who were present during this period, who are now regarded as 'legends' of Helsinki graffiti. These graffiti writers (usually always males) are described as persistent and committed to painting under hard control measures.

The majority of graffiti writers in Helsinki are still male, however, I would now like to bring attention to a less known gender category within this subculture. The subcultural accounts of women, and those performing gender differently to a heterosexual and masculine male category have been widely overlooked in Helsinki's graffiti subculture. In this chapter, my aim is to break the invisibility of different genders and explore the less imagined gender performed within the graffiti subculture. I am interested in those anonymous bodies that are often marginalized in the subcultural story-telling of graffiti writing in Helsinki. While illegal graffiti in particular is highly disembodied, I also try to understand how gender is performed when non-normative bodies are chased by formal crime control. Lastly, I explore how the performance of sexuality and gender in social graffiti circles sometimes opposes and breaks the normative expectations of the heterosexual matrix.

7.1 An introduction to a female saga in Helsinki graffiti

In this ethnographic journey one particular task kept me long immersed. It was to fill in the missing gaps of a female history in Helsinki graffiti, which seemed almost invisible and nonexistent, but which I was confident was ‘there’ to be discovered. It was not an easy task, for the hints and glimpses I was at first able to find were fragmented and disjointed, which made it difficult to form a coherent picture of women’s role in Helsinki graffiti. Today I know why. There is no coherent female history, as there is no coherent male history in Helsinki graffiti. Rather the female(s) saga is kaleidoscopic in its form, rendering an impressive power to challenge the normative meanings of graffiti, while bringing plenty of new conceptualizations to its scope. This extremely diverse history is unfortunately far too complex to be inserted here as part of my focused discussion on gender and control – indeed, this differently gendered history could comprise a thesis topic in its own right. What I offer here is therefore not a comprehensive narration of the whole ‘herstory’, but rather an attempt to exemplify how females and non-normative characters are often excluded in the narrative of Helsinki graffiti, controlled under a dominating image of a male norm in the subculture.

Women in Helsinki graffiti, particularly those from the past and those who paint illegally, are not often spoken about. However, among the first Finnish scholarly contributions on graffiti subculture, sociologist Jaana Lähtenmaa (1991) describes ‘bombing girls’ as a minority group among male-dominated hip hoppers subculture in Helsinki city center at the ‘City-käytävä’, which was known as an early ‘writer’s bench’ for the local graffiti writers (Isomursu & Jääskeläinen 1998). Lähtenmaa notes that the girls she studied in late-1980s were much more interested in the illegal activity of doing quick tags and bombing around the city or even at the central train yard of Ilmala, whilst boys in the same groupings contributed more time to the ‘artistic’ activities of painting large and complex graffiti pieces (Lähtenmaa 1991, 54). Later, Isomursu and Jääskeläinen (1998, 46) make a similar note in their book *Helsinki graffiti*, and mention *Cat*, *Kime*, *Tedy* and *Max* as dedicated tram bombers.

These limited, but important historic documentations of female participation in the pioneering Helsinki graffiti subculture indicates that a few young and underaged women were involved at an early stage in the scene, particularly with bombing and tagging practices around the city. Some of the ageing male writers I spoke to would

also describe a small but significant group of girls who used to bomb a lot in late 1980s:

Saku: Yes, when I started to paint, the crews I looked up to, they got girlfriends painting too. That was for us kind of, wow, chicks dare too! I've always put my thumb up for that, because this is so male-dominated, I've always thought that. I thought it was a pity when they stopped in 90s, they did it in 88-91 and after these chicks there were none. They were mostly into bombing. But also painting some good stuff, but no trains. In 90s I never heard of chicks painting. Maybe there was, but it had to be really minimalistic.

Many of the ageing male writers I consulted stated that girls suddenly “disappeared” from the scene at latest in the mid-1990s, and that it is only in recent years that a new crowd of females have become active in the city's graffiti and street art scenes, mostly on the legal side of the scene. Nevertheless, I could not simply accept this picture, because I was aware of my own history and that of the other female writers I met in Helsinki: Katri, Leena, Sonja, Isla, and Hanna. We had all began painting between 2000 and 2007. And a new generation of female writers who began to paint in the post-zero tolerance period was hitting up on trains, walls and tracksides, for example Adila, Petra, Emmi and Karolina. I was able to spot at least a dozen of women who had created a tag-name and used it without anyone's permission to claim a space for themselves on some of the city's surfaces, from walls, highways, along the metro line, and on electric boxes to freight trains and commuter trains.

There was, however, a gap in the history of women, from the mid-1990s to the early 2000s, that I was unable to account for. So, I began to ask around. Ageing male writers responded that there were some ‘girls’ who perhaps ‘tried’ graffiti back then, but that there was really no women at that time who would have been seriously involved in the graffiti subculture. I quickly realized that the second-hand information I was given was not going to help, and that I needed to meet those women who was ‘there’ in person to hear their side of the story. I was therefore truly lucky to meet two ageing female writers, so-called ‘ex-vandals’, who were able to describe their own engagement in the 1990s bombing scene.

I randomly met one of them, Linda, at a legal street art event in 2015. Today, she is a known street artist. Later that evening, when we had a chat in a pub, to my surprise Linda disclosed that she used to participate in tram and metro bombing rides with some of her male peers in the 1990s. She later invited me to visit her art

studio, where I saw her massive collection of ink markers in different sizes and colors. Linda explicitly said that she did not see herself as a graffiti writer, although she emphasized that her background in the writers' scene was a major influence for the art she makes today. Her tagging diminished as a result of ageing, however she never lost her attraction to tags in the urban realm:

Linda: Vandalism still enthralls me a lot, while of course when you get older you don't have that same appeal to do that any longer. I was perhaps not the main guy in all that vandalizing, but of course I was there. It still charms me when I see someone tagged around, bombed everything, and like all that paint dripping everywhere, that's really wonderful.

In 2018, I was very fortunate to meet another ageing female writer, whom I had previously heard stories about from a mutual friend. When I found out her given name, I contacted her on social media and later we met in person at her apartment in Helsinki. She started writing in the mid 1990s:

Nelli: I was bombing a lot when I was young, in about 1995 – 1997. We used to do long walks from Vantaa to Helsinki bombing all night. Early morning train home sleeping and then back to school. That was girl power. But when I started piecing my companions also changed, and then my best friend was a male. I never knew other women painting [pieces].

When Nelli started piecing in 1998, her peer circle changed to a male-dominated scene. She continued to paint until the early 2000s. Now she keeps her memories in her black book, which is full of photographs of her pieces, mostly from different halls of fame that no longer exist, some tracksides, and a few train panels that long ago have been washed away. Her pieces were skilled and there were a variety of chrome and multiple colored pieces. I had never seen them in any local graffiti magazines, and she had not gone online with them. I was impressed by her Finnish old school style and thrilled about her black book, because her photographs filled in a gap in my visual sense of a female history in Helsinki graffiti, something I had long been unaware of.

My response to suggestions that this once pioneering bombing girls' scene simply "disappeared" is that they actually never vanished. They just became less visible and more secluded in a male-dominated subculture. Some of them entered a predominantly male graffiti piecing scene on their own, and others turned to street art. Some may have grown out of their tagging activities, which ideally do suit

younger writers with more time to drift in the urban realm. However, a key reason for why the minority of women became less *seen* is a consequence of the emerging zero tolerance policy at the end of 1990s, and the subsequent fragmentation of the city's graffiti subculture. Under zero tolerance, the increasing buffing on the street was primarily focused on the tagging scene, and the cleaning up of trams and public spaces, where young women seemed to be particularly active (Lähteenmaa 1991). Another major reason for why this minority of young women became less seen by a larger subcultural crowd was due to the loss of graffiti writers' significant socializing spaces in the open urban realm, so called 'writers' benches' and 'halls of fame'. For example, the autonomous youth center 'Lepakko-luola' - a significant gathering place for graffiti writers - was torn down in 2000, and the still existing 'City-käytävä' was cleaned up as a subcultural youth space in the mid 1990s in line with the emerging zero tolerance criminology targeting youth on the streets in the city. Two of the oldest and most known halls of fame in Helsinki were also destroyed - 'Pasilan Galleria' was buffed in 1998 and became routinely guarded by security guards, and the so called 'Pulutunneli' at Huopalahti station was torn down in 2001 (Kalakivi 2018).

All these culturally important socializing spaces for graffiti writers were lost, and this had a fragmentation effect on the subculture in the early 2000s. The increasing buffing of walls and trains, and the juridical risks experienced by writers made them more secluded in their activities, which in turn further isolated women and heightened the value of being anonymous in this subcultural game. Many writers, both women and men, chose to keep a low profile in Helsinki graffiti, and for example the use of multiple tag-names is a common practice for many graffiti writers. For instance, Leena, Sonja, and Isla, tended to avoid public walls and painted mainly at nighttime or at hidden locations. This meant that the distanced characters assumed to be behind the tags become even more disembodied, and hence often imagined through the notion of male norm in the graffiti subculture. Indeed, women's presence was not always realized until someone actually made an exception:

Hannes: It was in 2000 or 1999, I was going to paint and we sat waiting under a train. And suddenly, there came about five – seven persons, a big group and everyone was wearing masks. And then there was a person who sat there, just really silently. It was a girl and I was so surprised. Here was one girl with us, and I had never before seen a girl even painting, and now a train! I was thrilled, but it was not until then I realized how male-dominated the painting scene was.

When I started to discover more women in the field, I found many of them describing stories of loneliness. They often reported that, “I thought I was the only one”, and positioned themselves as loners in a male world of graffiti. Most of the female writers began by painting with their own closed male-peer circle and were first unaware of other graffiti writing women. Although many male informants seemed to describe female writers in positive terms, I found many women describing a very different picture. There were several examples describing women’s difficult relationship with the male-dominated graffiti scene, which required a lot of motivation to override the social exclusion they faced in their male peer groups:

Leena: I was 15 when I painted for the first time. I had some close people, like my older brother who would hit up on anything and that was how I got interested. I bought my cans and went to paint. But it didn’t stay for long, as I was doing a lot alone...eh how should I say, yes it was a male domination. Men don’t like when you challenge them on their own field, and I was of course really young and all in my close circle of painters was like ‘you can’t paint’ and like that. I was bullied and quite sensitive, so I stopped. But I began to paint again after a couple of years and again it ended up in same thing. I was hanging out with guys writing, and I was silenced every time we were talking about writing, like if I said anything, everyone would just turn silent. Only because I’m a woman and I was much younger than my friends and it was so oppressive. So, I didn’t paint for a long time again. But then I finally found some friends who were more open-minded and since then I’ve been writing.

Nelli: I was annoyed by when the boys decided to go paint behind by back. One time I had a friend visiting from Holland and the boys went painting the metro without me. Took my guest and went painting. That really pissed me off.

Petra: It was tough in the beginning for no one took me along to paint. And if someone would, then it was about sex. Then I thought, I will show you all, like fuck you then, I’ll do it all alone then.

These accounts present female experiences of social exclusion in the male-dominated subculture. They also describe the ways women’s contributions to graffiti writing are taken less worthy than their male peers, as confirmed by other feminist oriented graffiti studies (Høigård 2007; Macdonald 2002; Pabón-Colón 2018). While this account for the patriarchal dominance ‘inside’ the subculture, I believe that the zero tolerance period, and the closing of the culturally significant socializing spaces for graffiti writers, further exacerbated the isolation of women and their ability to bond with other female writers. It was not until the post-zero tolerance era, that

women in the field became to form significant sisterhoods through graffiti writing. The rising popularity of graffiti in the city has certainly engaged the social integration of a once obscured subculture and there are now plenty of places for graffiti writers to meet and hang out in the public realm, for example the public walls in the Suvilahti district.

Although today many seem to acknowledge the growing scene of females painting at public walls, the majority of graffiti writers I spoke to, both women and men, were still truly surprised about the number of females I identified as participants in the city's illicit painting scenes. This would usually start a discussion on how someone is defined as an 'active' or 'true' participant in the subculture, whether they really painted illegally or if they mainly engaged in legal graffiti, if they were doing street art or writing 'real' graffiti. It is likely that many graffiti writers would not recognize all of the women I see as a part of Helsinki graffiti, because many of them are perhaps less 'known' according to the subcultural criteria dominated by a 'male core'. Most graffiti studies seem to agree with the idea that a writer has to 'get up' in order to be 'known' as part of the subculture (e.g. Castleman 1982; Ferrell 1996; Macdonald 2002; Pabón-Colón 2018; Snyder 2009). I disagree strongly with this idea, because this structure is established on a male-norm in the graffiti subculture, which tends to dismiss women's and other non-normative characters' subcultural contributions. Graffiti is much more complicated, and in reality, people relate themselves and others to graffiti in a number of different ways and styles. A good example is the graffiti chroniclers' and documenters' major position in the subculture, for their role as the photographers, editors, and story-tellers who produce material for subcultural media, contributes to who is 'known' and often reinforce the structure of male-norm (Publication III).

While my understanding of who is part of the Helsinki graffiti scene has more to do with my ethnographic experience, perhaps a more critical lens for exploring a female history is to ascertain whether these women see themselves as part of Helsinki graffiti. Let me explain this by an example from my field: When Katri and I met in the late period of zero tolerance, we began to follow a prominent street bomber in Helsinki, who we believed was a woman. I still do not know why we believed so, but it may be due to this bomber's unconventional style, which we did not consider as feminine, but rather as very different compared to other ordinary tags we saw on the streets. This person's tags and throw-ups were just so raw in their approach, and often very big in their size. They were bumping up in risky and visible spots in Kallio.

Katri was especially entertained by this unknown person's pieces on rooftops, as she was herself into the urban sport of climbing and painting on very high spots. You could tell that this person was writing in an energetic manner, as if they were totally out of control when getting into a bombing mode. This person also colored throw-ups poorly, which impressed us even more, and I remember thinking: "Oh, so you can do graffiti like this!" I guess this style would, from a general perspective be regarded as aesthetically less inviting, but Katri and I were ecstatic about the imagined lunacy we saw in these tags.

Many years later, in 2015, we finally met this figure at a street party organized by some male writers we had already affiliated this particular street bomber with. She was Isla, a cis-woman as we had been guessing, a few years older than us, and a mother. When we later had a more intimate chat, she surprised me considerably by saying that she did not think of herself as a graffiti writer. This, despite the fact that she was 'getting up' in a conventional sense in the graffiti writing game, and that she was credited in one of the prominent local graffiti magazines, which published her tags and throw-ups as well her pieces on freight trains and walls. She was probably considered as a writer by many in the local graffiti scene, and for me she was one of the most significant bombers in the city because she was able to demonstrate, with her own bombing style, a significant difference to the normative style of 'malestream' graffiti.

Very few women seemed to have been published in the local graffiti magazines and only two of the female writers I interviewed had gone online and kept Instagram-accounts for updating their graffiti pieces. As in Publication II (p. 498 – 500), I found that women seemed to have a more problematic approach to fame, that is to become known in a graffiti-sense, as claiming a name as a female writer in a male-dominated subculture inevitably brings a skewed attention to her gender as 'an exception', which may be used to discredit her actual doings in the subculture. This gendered logic of 'cheap' or 'instant' fame has also been confirmed by earlier feminist oriented graffiti studies (Macdonald 2002; Pabón-Colón 2018). Some of the female informants in Publication II thus asserted that they rather keep a low profile or be 'known' as anonymous and gender-less writers, not as 'girls' who write. In consequence, they would "conceal their gendered bodies to pass as worthy subcultural participants", as noted in a study by Hannerz (2017, 376) on bodies and gendered ideals in Swedish graffiti.

I spent a lot of time digging in subcultural media archives to research if there were any signs of women to be found. Finnish graffiti magazines in general only publish pictures of illegal graffiti pieces and favor the train writing scene, as noted in Publication III. There are only few textual framings to be found in these magazines, and if graffiti writers' bodies are visualized, then they usually appeared masked. These magazines could thus, at first sight, be understood as androgynous. However, some of the magazines portray women in an objectifying manner, which underlines the heterosexist male norm in the subculture. For example, *Boiling Point* magazine includes small pictures of women with large breasts bumping up in between the graffiti pieces and train panels. *AntiSocial* magazine (2009, Vol. 2) covered a whole page with an advertisement for the spray can brand *Ironlak* in cooperation with one of the local spray can shops, *Make Your Mark*. The advertisement pictured a woman holding a spray can in front of her nude breast stating: "BEST CANS". *Adults* magazine (2012, Vol. 1; 2014, Vol. 2) includes sections of "He Looks" which shows reprints of anonymized arrest pictures of men in different writers' outfits, hence further confirming the imagined stereotype of graffiti writers as men.

I was, nevertheless, able to find one very different story in the subcultural archives, albeit one which many writers I spoke to would disregard as part of the Helsinki graffiti narrative. The book *Graffiti - No name, no fame* by Joanna Bogdanoff (2009) is the first popular literature published on Helsinki graffiti after the period of zero tolerance. Bogdanoff was in fact a former FPS security guard in the early 2000s who converted to graffiti writing, and hence received mass media attention when she was caught painting trains in 2005. The book itself does not explicitly comment on the gender thematic, and a bigger part of the book illustrates the somewhat normative subcultural tale of graffiti from global to national contexts, including a massive amount of photographs and few interviews with graffiti writers. Yet, the interesting part of the book is Bogdanoff's own biographic history and her involvement with a security company, that she names in the book as "Men in black". Her personal narrative is actually a direct attack against the security company, which she dismantles by revealing controversial details as an "insider". For example, she states that the company kept an illegal personal register of graffiti writers, the existence of which many graffiti writers in have long believed in. However, the most fascinating part is her description of how she was pushed by the head of the security company to make a false report against two male writers bombing a tram. Guards making false reports about graffiti writers are not surprising from a subcultural point

of view, and indeed, this was by many writers to be expected. However, in the district court, Bogdanoff changed her witness testimonial and reversed her statement to let justice be done. The two writers were hence released from their prosecution and Bogdanoff received a fine for her false reporting.

The book was not greeted well in the local graffiti scene. Partly, may be explained with the unprofessional presentation of the book, which contained many pixelated images, yet also by what some writers claimed as her 'bitter' tone in her 'too subjective' story that seemed to have little to do with the 'real' graffiti subculture. The book was perhaps not perfectly composed, however the underlying reason for her contribution being downgraded had perhaps more to do with her character being strange and unrecognizable in the conventional plot of the graffiti subculture. She had a fuzzy 'double-role' in the subculture as an ex-guard and she was not a prolific writer in the city's scene, hence considered as suspicious when she started to promote her upcoming book online. An online discussion in 2006 on *Basso-foorumi*, a former website utilized by many local graffiti writers, reveals a condescending writers' discussion of her upcoming book: "and what the heck is this?? getting suspicious what kind of man is this Bogdanoff?". A lot of the critique online, as well in the field, was embedded in her imprecise status within the subculture, for she was a 'nobody' as many of the male writers I spoke to described her.

Bogdanoff was certainly an odd figure in the Helsinki graffiti, and I am not surprised that her doings were never credited within the subculture, given the brutal zero tolerance experiences of many young male writers, and the reputation of the particular security company she had been working at. However, her contribution to Helsinki graffiti must be read against the male-normative background of the subculture and the specific masculine competition labelled as 'urban warfare' between 'men' on the streets, as described in the previous chapter (see also Macdonald 2002, 108). Bogdanoff embodies an odd break in this competition for a superior masculinity and she represents a significant interruption in the seemingly fixed 'urban warfare' agent categories conventionally occupied by men, either as control authorities or graffiti writers. She does this not only as a female but also by confusing the stability of these two categories, as she slips from one category to another. And, through her confession of a false report at the court hall, she distracts the dominant masculine ethos of urban warfare and subverts the conventional subcultural tale of how guards should act and how writers should act amongst, or rather *against* each other. Therefore, the refusal of Bogdanoff as a significant

character in Helsinki graffiti is not simply a construction that places her as non-normative, a 'nobody', but also exposes the anxieties to changes to the battle of masculinities in the urban warfare, where simply the best 'man' should be winning, as Macdonald (2002, 121) notes.

The very exceptional story of Bogdanoff in Helsinki graffiti certainly violates the standards of the illicit male-dominated graffiti writing scene, and the wrong way of 'getting up'. Now, if women in the illicit painting scenes tend to keep a low profile and are therefore difficult to imagine in the history of Helsinki graffiti, then another challenge arises in the case of public walls. Many of the younger informants I interviewed for Publication II described how they felt that it was difficult to find other young women interested in graffiti and street art, and that it was challenging to attend alone as a woman at the public walls, where the majority of people painting were usually older men. Therefore, female-only graffiti and street art projects functioned as an important site for meeting like-minded peers, and as sites where "you can do your thing", as one informant explained, without being sexually objectified by the male-dominated graffiti scene (Publication II, p. 496 – 497). The ladies-only workshops organized by municipal institutions or the street art projects organized by feminist-oriented collectives are today a growing form of female input and are acknowledged as a part of the contemporary Helsinki graffiti, however they are still interpreted in terms of their lack of subcultural resistance and investment in the 'real' (illegal) graffiti subculture (Publication II, p. 497). The more illicit oriented graffiti writers I spoke to, both women and men, seem to view the legal vs. illegal graffiti binary through distinctions that operate in the counterpoles of domesticated/rebel, feminine/masculine, street art/graffiti, and mainstream/subculture, as also noted elsewhere (Macdonald 2002, 169). This kind of perspective tends to reconstruct the heterosexual urban realm of a 'hardcore' masculine performance as the original form of graffiti, while the 'soft' and 'law-abiding' graffiti femininities are being allowed to perform through novel forms of legal street art projects, often funded but also controlled and exploited by municipalities and cultural institutions.

However, we should recognize the importance of female-only workshops outside of the illegal/legal and subcultural/mainstream distinction, as this seems merely to reinforce the masculine ideology of Helsinki graffiti. Rather than understanding female-only workshops through the lens of an androcentric subculture built on a masculine hierarchy between 'toys' and 'kings', we should see the growing female

crowd taking space in the city's legal graffiti scene through their own terms, which establish their very own conventions, codes and values for social acting, which may in turn generate greater gender equality within the subculture. A prominent organization for female street artists and writers in Helsinki today is named *Mimmit peinttaa* ('Chicks paint'), which has been particularly successful in institutionalizing a feminist agenda in the city's graffiti and street art policy. They regularly arrange low threshold graffiti and street art workshops for girls, young women, and non-binary genders, and represent one of the most essential institutionalized programmes for establishing gender equality among a younger generation of graffiti and street artists in the city. Their annual public performances are also not only about females and non-binary genders painting together but they also bring attention to social justice issues and to equal rights for well-being in the city's realm. As an example, in 2015 on the Nights of Arts, Mimmit peinttaa painted a mural on one of the housing units owned by the Helsinki Mother and Child Home Association, which produces child welfare services for young families in the city.

The power of female-only graffiti and street art projects is that they bring invisible and isolated bodies together into the sphere of visibility and as such resist normative notions of graffiti. While illicit female graffiti writers do keep a low profile, these female-only street art projects, as a public performance, have an extremely important effect in changing the gendered imagination of graffiti writing. By going public, female graffiti writers and street artists expose their bodies to a mundane gaze and disclose their different gender performance in an otherwise male-dominated subculture. And this has a crucial effect in deconstructing the masculinized criminal symbols of graffiti beyond the legal sphere of graffiti. What I mean is that legal graffiti may have the effect of bringing down the deviant image of illegal graffiti, and even legitimizing graffiti on different surfaces for a mundane gaze. For example, consider the following fieldnote, where I was painting with Emmi at a wall which was 'not exactly legal':

One day Emmi and I had an interesting encounter with a family passing us by while we stood and painted a wall in the middle of the forest. The wall was in concrete and used to be a foundation for some kind of building. I knew one of my informants used to bring a spade here and dig the ground deeper next to the wall, thus extending the paintable space. I also knew the stories of writers who had been chased here by FPS and the police. It is a known spot among writers in Helsinki and because of its hidden location it is still considered as a 'daytime spot'. This location was covered with bushes and trees around and only randomly people passed by, if any during the

two hours or so I usually spent with writers here. I had painted at this spot numerous times before without any problems, so I was quite surprised about the confrontation now. At first sight, we saw a small boy around seven years, who walked into us through the bushes. He looked at us with wide open eyes and turned around to scream as loud as he could: "Mom! Come and look! They're spraying up here!". I felt a bit of adrenaline rush and Emmi stashed her cans quickly. Then the mom appeared and to our surprise calmly said: "Oh, yes they're doing these figures. It's all legal now, isn't it?" she smiled to us. Emmi said hi and I mumbled something back, a bit confused of what to say as the spot was not exactly legal. The mom then turned back to her kid: "We should come back and look at these figures, they always change here." The boy then turned around and shouted through the brushwood: "Grandpa! Come and look what we found!". The mom quickly took the boys' hand and said: "Shhh! Grandpa doesn't need to know everything!" and they quickly disappeared into the woods. Confused I turned to Emmi: "They thought this was a legal spot!". (Fieldnote, 2016)

Why the boy was making a scene of us painting at what perhaps for him seemed a strange place, and why his grandpa was not allowed to know about this is something we can only speculate about. Perhaps the boy had a sense of the prohibited aspects of graffiti, and maybe his grandpa was also aware of this. However, the point here is that the mother took an active approach in the whole scene by reassuring both her son and us of the unproblematic mundanity of the act of graffiti writing, recasting this as something that they as a mother and son could perhaps enjoy in their future walks in the forest. The mother even seemed well informed about the ephemerality of graffiti on this wall and that graffiti is routinized by the new layers painted over the old 'figures'. Perhaps grandpa would not have agreed with this interesting and enjoyable urban spectacle. But this did not matter, because the mother made sure we all felt comfortable and secure in this short moment when a hidden subcultural performance was met by a mundane gaze.

To conclude, there is no single female history in Helsinki graffiti, because people relate themselves and others to graffiti and street art in a number of different ways. Some females stick to the illegal side and keep a low profile. Others have found a great community of sisterhood in female-only graffiti and street art collectives painting proudly in front of a public audience, as feminist diplomats for the whole subculture. Some females I interviewed were not comfortable with being associated with a 'ladies-only' performance, even when predominantly enjoying public walls, because they refused a 'separatist' gender performance of graffiti. Some do not recognize themselves as 'graffiti writers' or 'street artists', but perhaps as something

‘else’ (Publication II, p. 499). What they all do share, as female ‘Others’ leaving their signs on the urban surfaces of Helsinki, is that they represent a break in the male norm of graffiti through their own acts of style.

7.2 Subcultural stories and chasing gendered bodies

Often graffiti archives are considered in visualized forms. Perhaps as printed graffiti magazines, Instagram-accounts, graffiti books, underground train writing videos, or maybe as private black books with old drawings and analog photographs, or as the more modern style of digital black books mapped on secretly located hardware. We are quickly convinced by this incredibly large practice of graffiti archiving, that writers, graffiti enthusiasts, urban documenters, as well the ‘train spotters’ (e.g. Publication III) have a great passion for documenting graffiti. The importance of visual documentation is surely embedded in the fact that graffiti itself tends to be ephemeral, prohibited and quickly removed. However, the prohibition of graffiti has also a tendency to create adventurous stories of urban bodies intersecting with control and movement in the city. Subcultural archives are therefore not only constructed in visualized forms, but also through the oral conveying of memories of graffiti writing, which has an important function itself for constructing hegemonic representations of a male-dominant subcultural community (Jacobson 2019).

Graffiti writers are often great story-tellers, particularly because of their control experiences. In *Publication I*, I reflect on how rule-breaking and experiences of the control system together construct specific carnivalistic moments, in the form of ‘edge experiences’ for a group of young male graffiti writers in Helsinki. These carnivalistic moments are then memorized and retold in a subcultural genre which I will here refer to as *chase stories* (in Finnish “rynnimistariniota”). Chase stories are important for writers to construct a mutual language that legitimates their own experience of the irrational, senseless menace of painting graffiti when security guards and police chase them on the streets, train tracks or in underground tunnels. The adrenaline kick that follows may include dramatic rule breaking, such as a ‘drunk bombing’ inside a commuter train during a rush hour resulting in a fight with both conductors and guards. These are stories that become important in constructing a narrative of a subculture that emphasizes a rebellious masculine attitude against controlling authorities (Publication I, p. 302 – 303). It is these stories, spread between

graffiti writers (usually males), that are part of the social process that construct writers as imagined masculine urban legends and as folkloric male heroes within the subculture. Experienced graffiti writers often become proficient story-tellers and the oral theatre depicting resistance to the control authorities are often considered as entertaining:

“At the pub, the lads sat down to follow the soccer game on the TV-screen; Finland against the Faroe Islands. I was given the seat in a position that put my back against the TV screen. It didn’t matter, I wasn’t into soccer anyway. Then Matti ask Miska to tell the story about his chase last week. Miska was *tased* last week when he was painting a train! I’ve never heard anyone in Finland been shot with an electroshock weapon just because of painting graffiti. “Yeah, but I heard some writer died because of that in the Yankees” says Joni. Miska shuts him quickly down by beginning his story on how he had painted between the trains, and when he was just about finishing his fillings, he saw the security running from the station towards him. Miska left the spot between the trains, ran over the tracks and stashed the cans in the park nearby where the police confronted him: “Stop or we will shoot you with a taser!” but Miska thought fuck it, I will just run harder. Miska was an excellent showman and I could see everyone was enjoying his storytelling. We burst out in laughs as we imagined how he was running away from the pigs. Then police fired the taser! “I could feel how I was hit in the neck, but I thought fuck I will fight till the last one standing!”. Miska stands up from the table and illustrates how his body was shaking until it gave up and he fell back down in the chair. He continues: “Cops screamed: Do you want more! DO YOU WANT MORE! And I wasn’t able to reply cause my tongue was all limp because of the shock! They then had difficulties to pull the darts out and I could feel how my skin was just stretching!”. Miska gesticulated on his neck and says blood poured out. “I was lucky I had not been drinking, I’m sure my heart could not have taken it” he was shaking his head. He recounts how humiliating it was to lay down on the ground as the people going out for a lunch were staring at him. Someone at our table says: “I’m sure they thought you done some really serious stuff!”. The lads were convinced that if the by-passers had known why Miska was tased, they would think of it as madness. It would have been seriously devastating if the police had shot Miska down while he was on the tracks with trains passing by. Miska then explains how the ambulance came and how the staff checked out his cardiogram and all kinds of stuff. One of the older lads takes his turn and says: “It’s illegal to shoot anyone in the head or in the heart! You could have died!”. He continues in a happier tone and says Miska called him directly after the incident and told him on the phone: “I promised you! I promised you!”. Miska had made a bet that he would still end up in a cell during this summer. Now Miska had done that, even if he stayed there only for four hours. He was escorted to the police station and already after one hour he was served a good lunch: “Chicken and rice!”. “A free lunch!” Matti laughs. After his lunch in his cell he was interrogated, and he denied everything. The police told him

that the train had a “chrome splotch” on it and they could not read it. He was released quickly after the interrogation. That was weird for the guys at the table! “Things have changed” said one. “Though, another guy busted at the same spot two weeks earlier stayed in for 26 hours, only for an attempt”, says Matti. He continues: “probably they thought you’re a lost case, Miska!”. We burst out in laughs, and my stomach was hurting from all the giggling. (field note, summer 2015)

Miska’s story was of course very exceptional in terms of the brutal police violence he experienced, and I never heard anyone else in Finland being shot by an electroshock weapon because of painting graffiti. But the rhythm and the style of Miska’s telling of the story was similar to many other male stories I heard in the field. These tales were remembered and retold during long car drives to and from painting spots, so as to gear oneself up for the upcoming painting action, or during late nights at someone’s home, atelier, or at the pub as in the ethnographic quote above. Someone would start with a story containing intriguing details experienced during a chase or when at risk of getting caught - often these narratives were full of strange coincidences. Another writer would then take a turn to describe a next chase story with even more captivating incidents. In this way, the male writers’ dialogs constituted a competition on the ‘worst’ chase experience (Publication I, p. 302). The social moments for telling these chase stories were located within a trusted community and these intimate moments allowed for the teller to process the experience of the chase together with other subcultural participants who shared similar experiences, and to debate the good and bad consequences for the whole. Therefore, these tales also function to construct a subcultural ‘we-ness’ against ‘others’ with different opinions on graffiti.

Chase tales operate on a distinction that values risk-taking and privileges the hetero-masculine ethos for graffiti writing based in the battle against controlling authorities. The art of getting chased is also featured in subcultural books, such as the *Getting caught* (2010) by the graffiti writer *Akay* (cis-male) in Sweden, and “The busted issue” of the graffiti magazine *Underground Productions* (2010, vol. 41). The significance of getting chased as a dominant subcultural narrative was also recently recognized in a graffiti and street art exhibition named as *Mom said no, but we did not listen* (“Äiti kielsi, mut ei me kuunneltu”) in Hämeenlinna, March 2020. This exhibition was comprised of installations that represent authentic forms of virtuous subcultural experiences. One of the exhibition rooms was equipped with head-phones for listening to a male voice reading tales of getting chased collected from graffiti writers.

It does not take much to realize the fact that the art of chase stories is dominated by male voices and male tales of an imagined male graffiti subculture, whether in face-to-face interaction at writers' nights of story-telling, in the form of art exhibitions, or as documented in the subcultural media. As noted elsewhere, the graffiti archives in general reproduce the gendered ideology of the subculture, which privileges male memory (Pabón-Colón 2018, 149). Some exceptions do occur in the transnational graffiti subculture, for example in the book *Graffiti Woman* (Ganz 2006) where a few female writers relate their encounters with the police, as well in the *Girl Power* -movie by the Czech female graffiti writer *Sany*, and in the subcultural chronicling of the graffiti writers *Utah & Ether*, a romantic hetero-couple that travel around the world to hit as many metro systems as possible⁵⁹. However, as it stands, chase stories dictated by male characters in subcultural chronicling is a normative standard, while dissimilar stories on control that depict alternative gender performances tend to be peripheral in the dominant subcultural archives.

When I started to interview women for this study, I quickly recognized the rather different response they seemed to face from the formal side of crime control. In Publication II (p. 496 – 498), I conclude that female graffiti writers and street artists participating in the study had almost no experiences of the crime control apparatus at all, despite painting illegally. Very few had problems with the police or guards and even when they came close to being caught, their bodies seemed to successfully 'pass' crime control. It was like a feminine body was an enigma for the eye of the law:

Adila: Well, I was never busted, but one time I was bombing and the police drove past me. They looked at me from their car, just staring both of them and I just paralyzed. I'm not sure if they understood what I was doing and I was dressed very like I had the high heels and the dress and I didn't look like a vandal. I think it had an effect and people would never believe, I don't have the hoodie on my head, people won't believe it then, would you do something when you're so girly. So, I'm sure it was about that.

Adila was a street bomber I met at a DIY-sauna in 2015. One year later I realized she was writing and I started to spot her tags near my office and in the downtown districts of Helsinki. I was charmed by her funny way of writing tags. Her letter-

⁵⁹ Vice 7.11.2016: "Renegade Graffiti Artists Utah & Ether Aren't Afraid of Getting Caught" (https://www.vice.com/en_au/article/78eg3z/utah-ether-renegade-graffiti-vandalism-art, 8.6.2020).

styling was sprawling and choppy, which made her style distinct and her tags stand out from other tags. But, as a figure Adila did not “look like a vandal”, as she states herself. Adila was often wonderfully dressed in feminine outfits and at parties she often wore high heels. Her strategy for dodging control was not about being taken as a man, but rather as a woman performing femininity. I have elsewhere described how feminine bodies in graffiti subculture are confounding for crime control, and that some female writers are able to exploit this stereotypical feature in order to escape control (Fransberg 2018, 101). Some informants described how they intentionally wore skirts when going out painting and actively pursued feminine traits in their bodily appearance when escaping bombing sites. In this way, writers and street artists with a feminine appearance were able to fool a crime control system that operates on conservative gender ideologies, and that imagines the typical graffiti writer as an urban man.

In a book chapter entitled “Hidden bodies and illicit performance – Women’s graffiti subculture in Helsinki” (Fransberg 2018), my emphasis is to make a shift in the male dominated chase narratives by documenting the few female writers’ chase stories I had heard in the field. In this book chapter, I interview one of my informants, Heini, who I became friends with in 2015. Heini was one of those women who liked to keep themselves outside of the legal painting scenes which she canned as boring. She was keener to paint freight trains or track sides. In the book chapter, she describes how she and two of her friends were suddenly attacked by security guards and chased along the railway track:

“...Two of my friends were caught, but I escaped. They [guards] ran after me and threatened me with a Taser several times. They shouted ‘This is your last warning, stop or we zap you!’ I mentally prepared myself for my first Taser shock, but then I realized that they can’t zap me if I’m running along the railway line. I ran for a metal fence, and when I touched it I realized that if they Taser me now, I would be facing certain death. Somehow I managed to clamber over and escape through a maze of suburban backyards. I ran for three hours before I got home. The next day my mates got out from the slammer and they said the guards had thought I was a guy – ‘the dude did a runner!’ they said.” (Fransberg 2018, 103)

In Finland only the police is allowed to carry an electroshock weapon in the urban realm. In the dark Heini was not exactly sure about who was running after her, so she instinctively feared for her life. When Heini’s friends got out and were able to tell her who their chaser was, she understood that the guards were only misleadingly

threatening her, as they are not permitted to use Tasers. However, the remarkable detail in her story is that while running away from her assailants, 'she' was believed to be a 'he'. Heini's story displays a temporal moment of transgender 'passing' in front of the control gaze. 'Passing' as a term is critically debated amongst queer theorists, as it has been used to illustrate successful gender transgressions, that gives privilege to 'pass' as a member of another gender category to another (Shilling 2008, 69). However, here the term is used as an accidental form of passing; Heini said that she was using dark clothes and a hoodie to cover herself but that she was not intentionally aiming to be taken as a man, although she was very amused by the guards' gendered imagination of her character. The masked figure was just the best way for her, as it would be for anyone, to hide their identity. However, illicit graffiti writing is, from a conservative control perspective, read as a domain of the male bodied. Passing in this sense is made possible due to the external social environment's demand to engage in either feminine female or masculine male body appearance – anything 'in between' falls outside of the hetero-logical gaze, which is incapable of recognizing the running graffiti writer as anything other than a 'guy'.

To conclude, chase stories embody the experience of 'edge' in the carnivalistic moment, a thrill in being able to balance on the sharp line between one's own capacity to perform extreme acts and to risk a confrontation with law and control, as noted in the writings of edgework (e.g. Lyng 1990). But for feminine and female bodied writers, who are culturally non-normative in male-dominated graffiti subcultures, there is a different strategy at work in the edge experience (Publication IV, p. 14 – 18). The 'edge' is not necessarily always an excitement conjured up in the competition for a superior masculine performance, but may also be an adventure that is generated by gender passing, which may take place for as long as the repetition of the performance has become mundane, or until a non-ordinary body is caught (Publication IV, p. 16). In Adilas' case, her hyper-feminine character was a powerful cover for street bombing, while in Heini's case, her androgynous masked body was unrecognizable as female. Their non-normative bodies in graffiti subculture can distract and fool the control regimes by playing on the disadvantages of a gender conservative gaze. These bodies parody control authorities in multiple ways and play on both feminine and masculine traits, while simultaneously demonstrate the weakness of the normative imagination of the graffiti writing body.

7.3 The disciplined train writers

Some graffiti writers state that zero tolerance has created a stereotype of a criminal graffiti writer. That stereotype portrays a deviant masculine image of a social outcast: “a poor wretch with the bailiffs constantly at their door, or a loser with a criminal record” as described by an anonymous Helsinki-based graffiti writer (Oksanen 2018, 73). The stereotypical illustration backed up with institutional categorizations such as the ‘habitual graffiti vandal’ (see chapter 5), is imagined to be young men living in a world of criminality, drug addiction and poor lifestyles. As for example, the Public Works Board in Helsinki city publicly stated fifteen years ago: “Quite many of them [graffiti vandals] die, for example because of drug overdose and others stop for example when they fall in love.” (Mäkinen 2010, 73).

Indeed, as was described in the previous chapter, the social legacy of zero tolerance has brought serious economic and social consequences for many graffiti writers in Helsinki, and there was certainly a ‘war’ between the writers and city authorities. However, graffiti writers’ self-conceptions are not always built on a deprived image of young masculinity performed through risk-taking and hazardous acts. There is another hegemonic picture of the Helsinki-based illicit graffiti writer, often imagined as superior in a transnational graffiti subculture, which is claimed to be the result of zero tolerance and hard control. As one of my informants recalls of his visit to New York:

“They saw us Finns, like we would be really hard-core types. They were talking about how they’re [the police] using the DNA and how people been sent back to Finland because of [getting caught of] the metro, and they were saying that how can you paint in such a difficult country...It’s different here, but if you do a lot, you’ll get in trouble.” (Hannes)

Another quote by graffiti writer *Yase* describes this well too in a recently published popular literature on Helsinki graffiti (Kalakivi 2018):

“And especially when we came under the yoke of zero tolerance, so we Finns had a strong vantage because we were used to vandal squads and telephones, and all that. That was noticed in the world. We had that kind of reputation. In Europe, they knew

it was hard to paint here. Yeah, often the crowd turned down to look on their toes when we presented ourselves as train writers, they shut up, even the trouper men.”⁶⁰

This section will take a look at *train writing* and the ways it has been represented as a disciplined masculine performance in Helsinki graffiti under the legacy of zero tolerance. Train writing is often understood as the most illicit genre in graffiti subculture, where writers trespass sealed territories at rail yards or in tunnels in order to paint graffiti on the outside surfaces of trains, metro and tram carriages (Publication I, p. 305, Publication III). While Helsinki city has changed its graffiti policy and the urban atmosphere seems in many ways much more relaxed than during the years of zero tolerance, the Finnish train company VR continues with a strict alignment against graffiti writers. Graffiti painted train carriages are removed from traffic as soon as possible, and the train company continues to invest in various surveillance methods, such as ‘profiling’ graffiti tags and using guards in civil clothes⁶¹. In other words, train writing still takes place in a zero tolerance milieu (Publication I) – which also reinforces the dynamic that attracts train writers to this subcultural play; “(t)he battle centres around a fight for power and control of the...system” (Macdonald 2002, 109).

In graffiti studies, train writing often presents itself as the superior form of graffiti writing and as the ultimate stage for ‘proving’ one’s masculinity in graffiti subculture: “a site where they can confront risk, dominate fear and validate themselves as men.” (Macdonald 2002, 107 - 108). Many writers that I followed in Helsinki considered train writing to be the graffiti subcultures’ own ‘extreme sport’ primarily enjoyed by a secluded group of established male writers. However, a few women also took part in train writing activities, and thus the train writing scene in Helsinki should not be regarded as an exclusively male scene. The few women taking part did however describe their involvement in a tight group of male train writers as double-edged. On the one hand, there was the liberating experience of an adrenaline rush when doing something forbidden together with a trusted community of like-minded

⁶⁰ My translation.

⁶¹ For example, Yle 28.4.2009: “Graffitimaalarit jäävät nyt kiinni profiloinnin avulla” [Graffiti painters are caught by using profiling] <https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-5244092>, and Yle 15.4.2015: “Junien töhriminen käy kalliiksi VR:lle – graffitien maalaus on jopa järjestäytynyttä toimintaa” [Vandalizing trains is expensive for VR – painting graffiti is an organized activity] <https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-7926897>, 29.7.2020.

people. On the other hand, the experience of being differentiated as a ‘woman’ tended to be actualized outside the train writing mission:

Katri: It’s not about that I would not be strong enough to paint trains. Actually, I’m often better in climbing fences and I’m usually the first one finishing the train panel. It’s more about that social connection beyond the train missions, that makes it difficult to bond with train writers who often are heterosexual men and that often leaves me outside when people are planning for the mission. I mean, it’s an intimate situation to lay down in the bush and wait for the right moment to enter a train yard, right, but in that moment, I feel not being different to the guys. It’s before and after the missions, that I’m again that ‘woman’. It’s strange to call somebody’s boyfriend or the married father to have a chat for doing trains. You have to have a close relationship to some of the guys to get in that community of men, you’ll be that sister, lover or whatever.

The few women interested in painting trains reported that it was difficult to find a consistent place in a community of male train writers. The social exclusion of women at the planning level of a train writing action tended to highlight the site as a men’s place, which made it hard for women to perform an independent and continuing agency in the train writing. As Leena for example described, “you’ll be always taken as the side-kick, someone’s girlfriend taking a visit in the male band”. From the female writers’ point of view, the strong homosocial bonding between male writers reinforced the gender dynamic that maintained the patriarchal construction of the train writing scene in Helsinki.

When I asked male writers’ opinions on why there seemed to be so few females painting trains, many quickly responded that women were smarter and therefore less prone to do something illegal. When I pushed for a further explanation, a few male writers suggested that the lack of female writers relates to the norm of female roles in the society, and a conservative gender regime that gives more freedom to men “to act crazy and impulsively on the fringes of the society” as Hannes explained. One male writer described graffiti as a ‘macho-culture’ which makes women less attracted to taking part in painting trains:

Saku: Somehow women are always seen as weaker, but I don’t think so. It’s more about what makes women interested in this. If most of us are men, it’s a macho-culture if you listen to what people are slanging. It’s always about that posing and that kind of stuff... But what I’ve seen now, well there are few [women] now doing it [painting trains], so we’re heading towards right way, this hobby ain’t about gender.

The train writing scene indeed emphasized conventional masculine characteristics, such as the performance of physically able bodies and a sporty appearance, with the technical gear train writers favored when exploring the train system in the terrains. However, most writers, both women and men, still underlined that painting trains was not a physical activity that should be understood as granted only to male bodies:

Risto: I suppose this hobby [train writing] seems to be pretty masculine. But, it does not have to be, because you don't need to lift trucks, I mean no man can do that either. It's not like that, though it's good to be physically in shape, so you can do a bit of climbing and run a little.

Train writers in Helsinki seemed to form small and trusted communities, whom they would ideally stay loyal to when performing train writing missions together in the capital area of Finland. This was of course not always the case: often train writing communities change as a result of some writers stopping painting trains, and new writers entering the scene. At times, these changes were a result of a practicality; a writer owning a car is often necessary for the group of train writers to travel to distant train writing spots. Sometimes disputes erupted over the train writing 'spots' and between those who bragged too much about train writing missions and thus shared confidential information of train writing skills outside ones' trusted community (Publication I, p. 306; Publication III, p. 23). Many established train writers underlined that it was hence important to find a community that was like-minded, but also disciplined in what they are doing:

Aleksi: If I think about who I respect, well I respect those who do it in a sharp way and who still do a lot. So how you distinguish writers is related to what you paint yourself and how you paint. When I was younger, I used to paint with everyone. But the older I got, the more I want to paint with people who got it in orderly ways. I'm tired of watching folks wasted and nuts going. I can have a drink with them and do a day-time piece, but I'd not do trains with them. That's dumb, I mean. Among my friends, people think about graffiti so differently, so basically I have those who I paint daytimes with and those who I paint trains with.

Aleksi was one of the train writers I had known for a longer period. He was very young when he started painting trains, only sixteen, and at the age of thirty-two, he was still passionate about train writing. He seemed to take his train writing activity

seriously by investing a lot of his leisure time in it, while actually rarely speaking too much about his secret, ‘second life’. He could appear at a daytime spot to do a nice graffiti piece, but keep to himself that he had actually painted trains last night. In next day, I would spot his train piece on an Instagram-account updated by a train spotter. To outside, he seemed quite ordinary – he always kept his economy stable by working constantly and had enrolled on a university course. His appearance was ‘casual’ and disciplined, there were no signs of any ‘subcultural styles’ on his clothing other than that he preferred to use his practical outfits: waterproof jackets, running shoes and a watch to keep an eye on the time. I guess I would never know that he was constantly painting trains, unless by knowing him. Similarly, to Aleks, many established train writers refused to paint with people who are ‘drunk’, ‘wasted’ or take ‘stupid risks’, while valuing cleverness and knowledge on how the train system functions (Publication I, p. 304 – 306). Another Helsinki-based train writer likewise emphasizes ‘patience’ and ‘intelligence’ over the stereotype of a bragging hyper-masculine ‘male’ writer:

“The stereotypical graffiti writer is admittedly male, which stems from the illusion that graffiti is a world in which only men can survive. First of all, it’s absurd to assume that men are physically more capable than women, because it depends on the individual, regardless of their gender. I think you need patience and intelligence more than physical strength and swagger. The physically powerful masculine ideal is partially perpetuated by generic online images of the archetypal writer engaged in some kind of Spartan rituals, as if they were about to wage war. This stereotypical masculine hero amuses me in a corny way.” (Oksanen 2018, 74)

Zero tolerance ideology assumes that train writers seek maximum visibility and recognition, and that painting trains is motivated by a desire to be seen by as many people as possible as the painted trains circulate around the city. Graffiti covered trains in Helsinki rarely circulate in traffic longer than necessary, as the train company removes these trains as quickly as possible. However, the successful train writer in Helsinki appears to value security over showing off, as concluded in both Publication I and Publication III. Zero tolerance seems to have had an enduring impact on how train writers have learned to keep their turf as tidy as possible, while minimizing any traces left behind for control authorities to find. There were a number of basic security measurements. For example, train writers avoid touching spray-cans with their bare hands so that they would not leave any fingerprints on them or on anything else that could be at risk of being left at a painting spot. It was certainly preferable

to not leave spray cans at a train yard, but the ever-present risk of being interrupted during a train writing mission could demand this. Train writers would moreover keep their 'digital traces' as minimal as possible, by switching off mobile phones during painting actions, or by avoiding publishing their graffiti pieces online (Publication III, p. 23). It was also regarded as preferable to use 'clean' memory cards in digital cameras in order to eliminate the risk of being related to other graffiti pieces in case the camera ended up in the hands of the police. However, one of the most extreme acts for keeping a train writing action safe in a sealed train depo was to paint a layer over the newly painted graffiti piece directly after taking photographs of it:

Kari: I had two extra cans for covering the panel after finishing. It was really strange to wipe over your own piece, but kind of fun too. That train was not going into traffic, so why would I leave my tag to be spectated by the security and the police? It's better to destroy the piece so nobody can read it.

Train writers also learn about how the train systems function by investing a lot of time in studying the infrastructure of the train system (Publication III, p. 22; Publication I, p. 307). This includes a detailed exploration of the traffic schedules, the routinization of trains on different train lines, their placement in yards, or their random stops on the tracks, before the train gets painted. As in a field note, when I followed two male writers, to check out a possible painting site:

"We reached the trackside and Matti explained: "The train will soon stop over there. It will stand there maybe ten minutes and maybe you could paint five". We were standing on a rock where we had a good view over the tracks. We could see the rail worker who was waiting for the train as well. "After that dude finishes his job and returns to his car, then you could start painting" Matti describes. In few minutes, a train arrives and then a locomotive comes with another line of trains. The worker connects the trains into one line and then walks along the rail tracks to the other end of the train. "Yeah, now he checks out the air pressures" Matti explains, and we listen to how the train made sighing noises in the quiet night. The rail worker finally finishes, and Matti checks out his watch: "Now we have five minutes until the train leaves". But in a minute the train starts to move and Matti cries out: "What the hell, it left too early! Last time it left 23 minutes past!". Matti says he will go back tomorrow and then ask if Riku is going to join him. "Why not, now when I have been already studying here" he smiled and rubbed his jaw." (fieldnote, summer 2015)

Train writers enjoy solving problems, as there are many obstacles to overcome before having a chance to paint a train: entering train yards, metro tunnels and

terminal stations with routinized guard patrols, rail workers, alarm sensors and CCTV. The high quality of spray paint today, and the use of specific nozzles allows a fast painting style, and experienced writers can therefore complete a graffiti piece, as a 'backjump' on a train within minutes (see e.g. Karlander 2018; Publication III, p. 23), as attempted in the field note above. Train writers map out the pulses of the whole train system as if it were a living organism constantly in movement. When they find a 'spot' in the train system that fulfills the conditions for completing a graffiti piece, they 'hit' up on it, leave the art piece, and then return to document it, if it happens to go into traffic. These post-train actions, or so-called 'train spotting' expeditions as described in Publication III, allowed me a lucrative ethnographic methodology for engaging with train writers:

"It's 7 am and I'm biking as fast as I can to get a clean SD-card at Leena's place. Leena opens the door and gives me the card and a glass of water. I run down to my bike and call Benu: "On which side of the train are they!?" "I can't take it now, they're in Tikkurila now!" he screams and hangs up. I get my bike and speed to a spotting place near the tracksides in Pasila. I get up the hill and see a pile of bikes. I throw my bike next to them and run up the rock and when I fight through the brushwood I shout: "They're coming now!!!" The group of writers standing already on the rock laugh: "What a noise you make!" I know, I'm loud in my manners. "How you know they're coming now?" Edu, Sonja and Hannes then ask me. "I called Benu!" I'm saying breathlessly. Two minutes till the zero hour and Edu laughs about our spontaneous reception committee, for none of us have agreed to meet here this morning to spot a 'whole-car' and an 'end-to-end' painted last night. Edu says the cops would have a nice opportunity to pick up the whole bunch now. Then, the 'whole-cars' pass us first but the rising sun with its backlit makes it difficult to photograph the train in motion. When the train after a quarter returns from central station I get better pictures. The group glows and hurray's when the train passes. Then the 'end-to-ends' comes, and again the backlit challenge us to catch a good shot of the train. We wait for the train to return from central station and now we manage to get satisfied photos of these as well, as the train moves much slower on the track that takes it to the 'buff'. We get good pictures of both 'sets' and people clap their hands: "We're great!". "I haven't done anything!" I respond. "Yes you have, you're criminal like we all are!" Edu laughs. We get to our bikes, and everyone splits to get to work and studies. It's 8.30 am. (fieldnote, spring 2016)

Sometimes train writers 'spot' their pieces, for example on Instagram-accounts that are dedicated to train graffiti. This is not always a desirable result, but a reality of contemporary train writing where city-dwellers and random by-passers are today

an active part of expanding the visibility of graffiti online and on social media. Many train writers want to control the ‘circulation’ of their own train pieces and prefer to publish their photographs in printed graffiti magazines (Publication III). However, ‘online spotting’ allows train writers to build up a subcultural topography of a train system: how actively a train line is painted and who is painting there. Sometimes train writers engage in research on a train system by utilizing several online information sources simultaneously before they ever visit the site physically, for example in another city (Publication III, p. 22). This makes train writers prone to research the online sites of the ‘railfans’ as well, and even to associate themselves as a subcategory of the railway enthusiasts’ subculture, as they too share a great passion for trains and the variety of different train models all over the world. It is in relation to this context that I have come across a concept that sometimes names train writers as *graffiti nerds*:

“I’m completely a graffiti nerd!” Aleksi laughs and smiles when we sit down and study the online forum for train fanatics. (fieldnote with informant in 2012)

Train writing as a ‘nerdy’ activity embodies graffiti writers in quite different terms to those presented by the zero tolerance project in Helsinki, or by previous academic research on graffiti masculinities that emphasize a risk-taking urban ego in the form of protest and outlaw masculinities (Høigård 2007; Lombard 2013; Macdonald 2002; Monto et al. 2013). As a general concept, ‘nerds’ are often characterized as shy individuals who are exceedingly intellectual and obsessive about topics that are unpopular, little-known or considered as marginal activities. Beyond the degrading categorization of nerds in popular culture, some studies have theorized nerdiness as a (sub)cultural space in which individuals are able to explore a range of unconventional gender performances (Woo 2012). At the same time, research on nerd cultures highlights the masculine characteristics of technically self-confident persons capable of performing successful lifestyles, which embodies contemporary hegemonic notions of ‘modern’ masculinity (Kendall 2000). It is in this aspect that a train writer growing up with zero tolerance policy may be represented as ‘technically’ superior to other graffiti writers, as noted earlier by some accounts in this section. However, there is not much research on ‘outlaw’, ‘deviant’ or ‘criminal’ nerdiness/geekiness, besides studies of ‘nerd masculinities’ and ‘geek femininities’ taking place as hacker subcultures in cyberspace (Steinmetz, et. al. 2018). Consequently, a focus on ‘graffiti nerds’, as skilled train writers, may add to the

recognition of a more nuanced masculine performance of illicit graffiti writing in urban space.

Let us look at another nerdy aspect of train writing. One characteristic proposed in the popular imagination of nerds is that they ‘collect’ objects that they tend to be obsessive about. Train writers collect artefacts of train companies: old train signs, railway maps, and even railway rocks in order to recall the specific scent writers experience when walking along the railways. But most of all, prominent train writers ‘collect systems’, hence successful train writers are sometimes described as ‘system collectors’ (Publication III, p. 22; Fransberg 2019, 66). To collect systems is to paint graffiti on different train and subway models, and to document these performances by filming and photographing the end result. It is these documented collections of graffiti pieces painted over different train models that objectify the subcultural capital of a successful global train writer (Fransberg 2019, 66 – 67). Traveling train writers are interested in a variety of different trains, though often their interest in specific models represent a train writers’ ‘taste’ or style for a person’s train writing. Some only hunt top-secured underground systems, while others value the ‘trashed’ trains taken out of service long ago, which are thus often easier to paint. But nothing is perceived as more precious than the trains you grew up with (Publication I, p. 305). In Helsinki, a common example of this nostalgic preference is the old commuter train named by the endearment ‘Red-Devil’, which no longer is in service (e.g. Publication III, p. 20 – 21). As graffiti writer *Yase* describes his sorrow and longing for this particular train model (Kalakivi 2018):

“It was a sad feeling when the best train in the world disappeared. I don’t like those new trains at all. They come from Italy and they are made of plastic. They don’t turn me on. But the youth may be painting them. They can grow up with them and maybe have a similar nostalgic relation to those trains someday. But my soul is attached to these [old trains], so if I could do [paint] that kind of train even as a trashed one. Well I would be more satisfied than about those new trains.”⁶²

Like Yase above, many train writers I followed used interesting terms when they discussed their passion for old commuter trains in Helsinki. Concepts such as the desire to “do the train”, and the sense that, after “doing it”, it became “our train” and seemed to reinforce the unique sense of ownership train writers felt towards the old train model. If some unknown train writers happened to visit a train writing spot

⁶² My translation.

considered as belonging to someone, then the intruders – often depicted as foreign writers or ‘toys’, were accused of ‘raping’ the spot (Publication I, p. 306; Publication III, p. 23; Fransberg 2019, 69). It was as if the trains were regarded as having a soul, which compelled train writers to paint respectfully and in disciplined ways on the train. Another train writer in fact suggested that the passion for trains could in a way be seen as a form of object sexuality or ‘objectophilia’, where human beings have a romantic attraction to particular items or structures. Train writers may be understood as heavy metal lovers, perhaps even as ‘trainphiles’ and ‘metrophiles’, or as an underground train graffiti writing movie published in 2008 is titled, ‘Metrosexuals’⁶³. This movie, as with many other train writing movies found online or sold as DVDs at spray can shops, documents the transnational game of collecting different systems around the world by illustrating how clandestine train writers manage to paint over different subway models.

The most profane train for train writers in Helsinki is indeed the Helsinki metro with its orange steel, that sometimes goes by the nick-name ‘Carrot’ and which only a few train writers managed to paint (Publication III, p. 22 – 23; Fransberg 2019). Therefore, some train writers seemed to be protective of the Finnish metro system, some even furious when so-called ‘graffiti tourists’ manage to paint the Helsinki metro and publish their achievement online (Publication III, p. 23; Fransberg 2019, 68). The negative aspects of ‘showing off’ seems to relate to the small size of the Finnish train system and the authorities’ attempts to minimize train writing, which afford fewer opportunities for painting the trains. Thus, some local writers were prone to seal their own achievements off from a wider audience to not attract ‘other’ train writers to visit Helsinki (Publication III, p. 23). Subcultural media seems to operate as the main stage for strengthening a graffiti writers ‘name’ and ‘fame’, though many Helsinki-based writers seem to have a complicated relationship to publishing their achievements, which underlines that graffiti writers are not always motivated to gain visibility by any means. This makes some writers’ relationship to subcultural fame a multifaceted game, that is not simply set out in an urban milieu as a fight against control authorities and buffering policies. Indeed, it seems a hard policy is sometimes useful for locally based writers in a subcultural competition that goes beyond the city and the digitalized milieus (Publication III). A less attractive ‘graffiti city’ with a reputation of hard control keeps its treasures and train writing

⁶³ Graffiti movie “Metrosexuals” documenting subway graffiti in twenty different subway systems (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XKCGknPr9dY&t=10s>, 29.7.2020).

spots less known to a wider subcultural audience, while favoring those deep-seated in the local game.

7.4 Graffiti longing and a potential for change

Train writers often have a unique and romantic relationship with trains, and in some respects, there is even a potential to read their obsession with trains in sexualized terms. However, the graffiti subculture in Helsinki is predominantly a heterosexual subculture with the majority of men and women interested in dating or living romantically with the people of the opposite sex. Moreover, the heteronormativity in Helsinki graffiti was strongly manifested during zero tolerance, as noted in Chapter 6, and calling guards ‘homos’ was still a common phrase during my first years of fieldwork:

We took the last train to Pasila. In the train we see two guards. They walk through the train carriage and when they pass us, Atte says loudly “Homo!”. The guards do not take notice, though all other passengers turn their heads to look if there is a situation going on. A moment later, the guards return and pass us a second time. Kari hides his beer under his cap. Atte, again very loudly: “Maybe you should do some more work-out?” The guards remain silent. We are too many and too old for them to do anything. (fieldnote, autumn 2012)

Using homophobic discourses to subvert one’s rival does not exactly make the graffiti subculture a welcoming place for queer people. Throughout my years in Helsinki graffiti and meeting hundreds of graffiti writers, I never heard of any homosexual or lesbian relationships amongst writers. However, four of my informants, two male writers and two female writers, in confidential talks described themselves as bisexual, although they were primarily living in heterosexual relationships. Three of them were not open about their queerness and unfortunately there were even friends who were unaware of their mutual interest in intimate same-sex relations.

While these are marginal positions in the predominantly heterosexual and male-dominated subculture, I find it crucial to note the four informants’ queerness as an alternative to the subculture’s granted, and at times, violent heteronormativity. I also have no doubt that there must be more graffiti writers and street artists who recognize themselves in non-heterosexual ways, as I did not regularly ask about

informants' ways of self-identifying their sexuality. These disclosures of differing sexual identifications came up spontaneously, yet always in regard to when discussing the potential for change in normative gender structures and the progress of gender minorities in Helsinki graffiti:

Malin: So, why do you think women are not co-operating more in Helsinki?

Petra: This is because... Hey, by the way you have not asked about my sexuality! Cause, you know, I'm bi, so it would be fascinating if all the women would just unite and then we could leave all the men outside!

Petra was one of the younger female writers I encountered. She was in her early twenties when we first met at a street art event in 2015. Before I had the privilege to meet Petra, I had heard many rumors about her and often saw her graffiti pieces around in the city at quite audacious places. Her letter-based pieces were unavoidably visible on tracksides and along highways, for she always painted in big formats and handled the use of spray paint technically very well. I was extremely curious about her, for Petra seemed to represent a marginal, but a growing generation of young female writers in the city who were interested in the illegal side of graffiti. I was pleased when she agreed to be interviewed. Petra described that she began painting in 2011 as an influence of the music she was listening to, and quickly thereafter started to travel for graffiti writing in several countries. During her journeys, she became friends with female writers who were more experienced and several years older than her. She explained that they became important role-models for her and that she received a lot of emotional support from them in her own steps in graffiti writing. Petra was incredibly self-motivated and brave, and she had a strong urge to paint anything from tracksides to trains. Over the five years that I have now followed her, she has certainly made a name for herself in Helsinki graffiti, and to me it seems that she has become 'known' even amongst the 'older' and established male train writers. However, her sexual reputation seemed to be under close scrutiny in the local scene through male gossiping, and she was obviously struggling to find her own place in the local graffiti subculture.

Petra claimed that she felt much more welcome within her transnational network of female writers established through her travelling than in Helsinki. She still keeps in close contact with these women, and some of them have visited her in Finland. Just as they have taken care of Petra during her travels, she takes care of them and takes them out to paint when they visit her in Helsinki. For me it appears that Petra

is clearly resisting her female loner status by establishing her very own community of writers across national borders and beyond the locally-based graffiti subculture. In a similar way Pabón-Colón (2018) recognizes female graffiti writers' ways of resisting their female minority status in graffiti subculture by joining a transnational feminist movement of graffiti writers and by taking advantage of social medias to form 'affective digital networks'. However, amongst my female informants interested in the illegal side of graffiti, Petra was the only one who was so actively engaged in a transnational female writers' community. Many female writers I met did travelling for graffiti painting and many did report on their experience of the transnational graffiti scene, yet none were so explicitly invested in a female network as Petra was. In relation to her comment above, I found it interesting that she seemed to interpret the absence of female solidarity in the local graffiti scene in regard to the heteronormativity of the subculture, and by raising the possibility of a differently gendered realm with respect to her own sexuality. In fact, the connection between isolated female writers, heterosexuality and male-dominance seems to work in a dynamic that improves the patriarchal construction of the graffiti subculture by appreciating lone straight women amongst a group of male writers, while simultaneously reducing female solidarity between the number of women prone to paint illegal graffiti in the city (Publication II, p. 497).

Besides the more immediate focus on differing sexualities in the otherwise predominantly heterosexual and male-dominated field, I also considered alternative ways for analyzing the seemingly heterosexual Helsinki graffiti with a 'queer lens'. One way is to look at the temporalities of different kind of desire and social rebellion beyond a fixed sexuality and by engaging in what is not yet 'predictive' or 'fully realized' in a subculture (Halberstam 2005, 177). As Halberstam (2005) proposes, approaching queer desire beyond romantic couple-forming allows us to understand queer as 'acts' in subcultural lives that oppose maturing into heteronormativity in 'time' and 'space', and which hence also prolong the stage of 'youth' as an alternative mode to heterosexuality. While graffiti subculture is almost never described as queer, Pabón-Colón (2018, 21 – 22) do claim that graffiti writing is an act that is queer by its praxis, for it is constituted by a performance that claims space in the urban realm in non-normative ways. Graffiti subculture is indeed constructed by a non-normative activity that essentially challenges the conventional usage of urban space, however, it tends to, as far as research has shown, give privilege to heterosexual bodies, and in

an appearance that is highly normative for the streets: the youthful and masculine (Ferrell 1996; Macdonald 2002; Snyder 2009; Publication I; Publication III).

Within this urban realm attributed to the youthful and masculine, I would nevertheless like to bring attention to a specific stage in a graffiti writers' journey, which also relates to Petra's journey above, and which may open the potential for difference in a heterosexual and male-dominated graffiti subculture. This is perhaps the earliest stage in a writers' path into the graffiti world, that usually takes a form of a *homosocial longing* in the subculture, as it often expresses the young novice writer's desire for the recognition of the older and more established, yet often *same* gendered, writer. It is often the first desire that a graffiti writer recognizes when illustrating one's own early path in graffiti writing, and which I prefer to call *graffiti longing*. It also relates to the development of graffiti aesthetics, as graffiti writers tend to be influenced by, and to adopt styles through, the appealing experience of prominent writers' tags. This is, moreover, what some graffiti writers mean when they say that graffiti is actually about 'copying' or 'biting' things; the stylish process in the subculture "which blends shared aesthetic conventions with an appreciation of individual "innovation and creativity" (Ferrell 1996, 85).

Graffiti longing is most of all an intimate gender dynamic in the graffiti subculture, that partly upholds the homosocial continuum between male writers and maintains their gender as normative for the subculture. As homosociality refers to a desire for social bonding between the same sex, it is often used to explain the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity and for identifying the social mechanisms that safeguard the interests of men (Hammarén & Johansson 2014). Therefore, and as we have also seen in this study of Helsinki graffiti, the intense aspiration for intimate relationships between hetero-men is sometimes prone to developing homophobic and misogynist language in an attempt to affirm their own heterosexuality (Hammarén & Johansson 2014, 2; Sedgewick 1985). However, I would like to explore the homosocial desire in graffiti in a more nuanced way, and not only as a structure that reinforces hegemonic gender relations, but as a passionate search for others and as a desire for those *similar* to oneself in the graffiti subculture. Moreover, graffiti longing as an initial desire that sparks a love for graffiti keeps new generations of writers rising to create a longevity of graffiti, while also incorporating a potential for change to its gender dynamics, as in Petra's case.

Graffiti longing as an early stage for graffiti writers is often recognized as a lust for belonging to the subculture and is often portrayed by the young writers'

admiration of tags spotted on different surfaces in the city. Sometimes it is realized in the sense of discovering a prohibited system in the urban realm by following the repeated tags seen on surfaces, which for the spectator present mysterious disembodied urban characters while simultaneously creating playful fantasies about them. To illustrate an example of a young writers' longing for graffiti, let me quote an essay titled *Eyes, that only sees names* written by a Helsinki-based visual artists Tatu Tuominen's (2019, 36):

“It was obvious for us, the neighborhood boys who soon were reaching out for puberty, that it was prohibited, even illegal to do them. And this, if anything else, made them *desirable*. They were a category of their own, a closed system. My conclusion was that the only way to know what these *words* really meant was to do themselves. (...) Writing words was different than to just watch them. The fear of getting caught, and the excitement that followed, the different and heady smell of solvent and paint, the marker with the squeaking felt tip, nearly frictionless gliding on windows or its scratching on rough plaster, a conscious crossing of the line, the guiltiness, and how you with your middle-finger routinely pushed the marker inside the cuff – to be hidden from the gaze of adults, neighbors, parents and actually everyone else too. It was a pleasure to watch your own work: a word on the wall. We were alone, but we knew that somewhere there had to be *others*. This we saw on the surfaces of the boxes. We fantasized unreal stories about, who and what kind of figures Shocky and Blitz were, and we told them as true to each other. We wanted to meet our *idols* or at least to make sure, that they would know what we had done.”⁶⁴

Tuominen's essay depicts his own early introduction to tagging practices as a little boy in late 1980s Helsinki, first on the electric boxes on the streets of the inner city and then gradually extending to underground tunnels, wastelands and to the outskirts of the city. Tuominen describes the intimate discovering of a new play, a prohibited 'closed system' that was hidden from all who represent normative life: adults, neighbors, and parents. But in his young peer group of 'good boys', as he recalls in the essay and later described as peers with middle-class background, he finds inspiration to explore this hidden system of 'words'⁶⁵. Together they develop a desire for writing new words and comfortably express their longing for others in the graffiti subculture. They are at first alone in this disembodied adventure, but are also ironically unaware of the name of this game until later, when the father of one of the

⁶⁴ My translation and my emphasizes in the excerpt.

⁶⁵ The concept of 'word' is still the most common way of expressing the subcultural term 'tag' in the local graffiti argot.

boys steps in and presents them with the well-known book *Subway Art* (Cooper & Chalfant 1984). Before this, they did not know of words such as ‘graffiti’ or ‘tag’. They just avidly observed these new non-categorized words on urban surfaces, which spoke to them and invited them to write also. So, Tuominen and his ‘good boys’ began to write their own words and to fantasize about the other words, and the disembodied figures behind them that they saw as their *idols* - *Shockey* and *Blitz*.

Another story of discovering graffiti by one of my informants also portrays the idolization of an unknown writer. One of my male informants, Hannes, an active train writer nearly in his forties, was actually one of the graffiti writers that disclosed himself as bisexual when I interviewed him. To the outside world Hannes lives a heterosexual life: he is married and though his wife knows him as bisexual, he says that no-one in his graffiti crew is aware of his differing sexuality. Hannes describes how his own, slightly lonely but happy, suburban childhood brought him into playful ways of discovering urban spatiality and the ‘mystiques’ he desired to solve, as he puts it. Graffiti finally became one of the greatest mystiques in his life when in mid-1990s he realized the existence of the tag-name *HIV*⁶⁶:

Hannes: And then HIV started to appear everywhere. I remember one trip [between two cities], you could spot HIV all over along the road, and everywhere. At that time, there was a few graffiti magazines, but not that kind of world that we have today. Back in the days that spatial experience was so important. If you think about a boy in 14-15-years, well that experience is vaulting when you dwell around in different cities and you see that someone has overrun all the places. It was HIV in 95, 96, and he painted everywhere and I all the time felt that he was somewhere close, like where’s that dude. Then you start to form a person behind that tag. I imagined a male person, a guy doing that somewhere, even if I back then didn’t know of any other writers, because graffiti was for me sort of fumbling and self learnt.

Malin: Did you ever meet HIV, then?

Hannes: Actually, yes, I met him. In 96 I started to know more about him, I knew what he was studying and that he lived in Helsinki, I heard such rumors. Then I had a friend who had this older sister. Her friend Benne, well HIV was hanging out with Benne and they went always together out partying. Somehow, I understood they were together because Benne is homosexual and that they were a couple. Then I always tried to end up at same parties, so that I’d got the chance to meet HIV and finally I got. He had this bomber jacket with a crossed swastika. I thought, what a fucking

⁶⁶ HIV was an active graffiti writer in Helsinki from the mid 1990s to the early 2000s, and a legendary figure for many graffiti writers in Finland. The book *Helsinki Graffiti* (Isomursu & Jääskeläinen 1998) is full of his tags and graffiti pieces on trains and walls spread all over in the capital city and beyond in the province as a ‘virus’.

cool guy, like super overactive, all the time going everywhere, and I was like, ok he's a bit too much for me, but fucking cool lifestyle, just painting all the time.

In subcultural stories that express the young male writer's prohibited desire for graffiti, like Tuominen's (2019) essay, or Hannes' experience, the disembodied graffiti 'idols' are commonly portrayed as males. The longing for the mysterious graffiti writer is paradoxically built on an imagined character that is not yet embodied, but yet still neatly placed within the normative notion of a male body. Moreover, the way Hannes describes his idolization of HIV and his fantasies about the male character behind the tag, as well as his conclusions about HIV's sexual orientation, and his own active efforts to encounter his idol, are reminiscent of an innocent teenage crush. Hannes' story is indeed exceptional in that no other writer described their graffiti idol's imagined sexual orientation so precisely. However, the younger graffiti writer's 'fandom' for prominent famous writers, as an accepted subcultural form of desire in subcultural story-telling, is often an ordinary way of describing one's own initial engagement in graffiti subculture, though is rarely confused with a form of homoeroticism. This is confirmed by the male-dominated subcultural archives and the popular graffiti literature that regularly includes a focus on first influences in graffiti writing and early graffiti role-models in interviews with graffiti writers (e.g. Kalakivi 2018). It is also this accepted form of homosocial desire that reinforces the graffiti subculture as male gendered:

Joakim: There are no big role models for women. If you think about that the subculture is surely 90% of men, then of course the legends are also men. So, for me yeah, Lady Pink, but maybe Mickey⁶⁷ was someone whose style I've always been digging. So, there are not many [women], and I think that the lack of role-models has long been the reason for why few women are getting up. If you're an eleven year old girl, they don't know that women paint too, but if you're an eleven year old boy, then you're 100% sure of that graffiti was made by a guy. It's like an admiration phase of older brothers.

Joakim proposes the lack of female role-models as a reason for the absence of women in graffiti. I would like to add to this notion that the longing for a female

⁶⁷ Lady Pink is often considered as one of the prominent female graffiti writers in late 1970s and early 1980s New York's subway graffiti subculture. Mickey is often described as the first female train writer in Europe, starting painting graffiti in mid 1980s and is still an active graffiti writer. She was, for example, one of the only female artists invited in the large Graffiti -exhibition by Helsinki Art Museum in 6.4.2018 - 9.9.2018.

other is also something that is very difficult to articulate between women in the heterosexual and masculine graffiti subculture of Helsinki. This is because female solidarity effectively reduces the support that might otherwise come with a female solitary role as 'one of the boys', and because the subculture favors signs of masculinity over femininity. As a female informant describes:

Jenni: I've always hung out with boys and I always got better along with boys. They're much easier to be with. You don't need to do that talk about hair styling and make up. It's a bit difficult, because I don't feel I am a girl in a boys' club, I'm just one of them. That's why it's difficult to think of oneself as a minority in this hobby... I mean, I know I am a woman, and I know I like boys.

As in Pabón-Colón's (2018) study, I also observed that most of my female informants self-identified themselves in masculine terms. Very often female informants would discuss their presence being 'boyish' and having a desire for masculine hobbies, not just graffiti, but other activities such as skateboarding. While the opportunity for masculine performativity was surely a reason for why some women were interested in graffiti, being boyish seemed to be required in exchange for subcultural acceptance among male writers, as long as this did not slip into deviant forms of sexuality. Let me cite one of my own experiences of excitement when discovering a female other in the Helsinki graffiti subculture:

People are happy, the music is loud, and we are dancing. Someone has set up a less professional looking DJ table and the sound system is playing new wave, techno and synth pop. It's about 2 am and soon the sun is about to shine. People are by now pretty wasted. I'm the new figure in this crowd of about twenty persons; it's graffiti writers, bohemians, stinkers and alternative characters of Helsinki's cultural underground that have gathered at Ilja's art studio. Most of the others know each other from before. They have been in the same art school or work together in some creative projects. Some of them work with photography, film, others within the restaurant business and so on. I have just met Sonja and together we dance on the floor. I don't know her well, but I know she writes and that she's part of one of the graffiti crews active in Helsinki right now. She's the only woman in that crew and I'm really curious to know her. I'm actually really excited that I finally had the chance to meet her, cause before I only heard rumors about her. Her figure is now embodied for me, yes, she really exists! Then Ilja comes dancing towards us and shows his hands towards us: his fingers illustrate scissors that cut each other. I know what that sign means, it's the stereotypical framing of lesbian sex labelled as scissoring. Me and Sonja both raise our eyebrows and look at each other and laugh. The music is so loud

that Ilja bends his head towards us: “Be aware, Malin is trying to score you!” (summer 2015)

It was obvious that I wanted to become friends with Sonja, and we did eventually become very close friends. Sonja and I had a something to share; we were both used to hanging out as the solitary woman in predominantly male graffiti circles. Our presence as females in the graffiti subculture was already non-normative, yet together our company presented a whole different desire in graffiti no longer dictated by a male associate; we were becoming less dependent on male friends, and we could plan and schedule our own painting activities without men. We could also, at least temporarily, accomplish a non-male space in the graffiti subculture every time we put up our tags and marked our belonging to the city space. Our relationship was clearly different within a very heterosexual and masculine subculture, and Ilja was not the only male friend who implied an intimate lesbian relationship between the two of us; even a few years later I got the query if I ever had a crush on Sonja. It was with perverse interest that some of the male writers followed the beginning of our friendship, and for a moment our friendship became a matter of interest to others; boyfriends and other male friends were involved and concerned with how our relationship would develop. During this period, I was first presented as a threat against the new circle, because my position was a conundrum; I did not have a monogamous relationship with any of the males, my intention in socializing with this peer group was not yet obvious, and I could possibly have ‘scored’ Sonja away from the male-dominated peer group.

In the long run, our friendship eventually became normalized after someone started calling us ‘sisters’ – a permitted kinship within a heterosexual matrix between two unmarried and childless adult women writing graffiti in their thirties. But, the fact that our relationship for a moment became sexualized discloses the compulsory heterosexuality in graffiti subculture, which does not only place the isolated female writer as the ‘property’ of the male-dominated peer group, but also describes a male anxiety around female homoeroticism in the graffiti subculture. Pabón-Colón (2018, 21) note that the very term ‘lesbian’ is regularly used to disparage women who assert themselves as graffiti writers without the help of a heterosexual romantic partner. Moreover, the bonding between women in the male-dominated graffiti subculture is surely reduced in the patriarchal construction which recognizes the masculine behavior of women as lone exceptions amongst a group of male writers. The note above, moreover, uncovers a fear for female homosociality gliding into forms of

homoeroticism. The continuum between homosociality and homosexuality is indeed well debated in gender studies, however it has for the most part concerned the relationships between men, while often granting forms of female friendship as normative (e.g. Hammarén & Johansson 2014; Sedgwick 1985). Yet, here we might recognize a form of ‘homohysteria’ over women engaging in a masculine subculture.

To conclude this section and this chapter, I would like to underline the complexity of gender dynamics in Helsinki graffiti, and the potential for change in gender structures by recognizing the importance of graffiti longing as a nuanced form of homosociality with a promise for difference to heterosexual male desire. My intention here is not to suggest that all graffiti writers would turn out gay beyond the restrictions of heteronormativity, but to emphasize that this longing for others in graffiti is often an accepted desire for friendship, and that reveals emotional closeness and the sharing of intimacy over something that is forbidden in the cityscape. Although the prevailing male-dominance of Helsinki graffiti may subvert female friendship as a deviant form of graffiti longing, it may also recognize the potential for questioning the overtly fixed gender structures in masculine subcultures that often only focus on toughness, rivalry, and competition. Most subcultural studies of graffiti focus on how graffiti writers ‘get up’ and perhaps earn a status of ‘king’ or ‘queen’ (Castleman 1982; Macdonald 2002; Pabón-Colón 2018; Snyder 2009). However, by shifting the attention from the subcultural creation of a self-centered ‘graffiti self’ to the intimate desire for others we may start to recognize changes in the subcultural scripts of gender positions in graffiti. Most of all, we may start to imagine the disembodied character behind the graffiti tag in new ways. As Hannes states:

“Lately, I have noticed, that I don’t take it [gender] for granted anymore. It is also about that this game has changed so much, people change words [tag-name] and such, so you can’t create that imagination [it used to be], it’s like, I can’t visualize that person anymore. Sometimes I can recognize a style, like oh that person just changed the word. But if it’s a total mysterious like as soon as there is a new word, well in this day it beats me empty. Because today that possibility is constructed in my head now, that it might well be a cis-women who does it.”

8 CONCLUSIONS

In the Prologue of this thesis, I wrote about my office located in Pasila Street Art District, and I described how some art pieces in this district are kept, and others washed away. I now wish to note another urban spectacle that I had an opportunity to follow in this district. A couple of years ago I attended the annual conference *Street Art & Urban Creativity* in Lisbon, a venue which gathers graffiti and street art researchers, academics, and urban activists from all over the world. At this conference, I met a street artist and activist, and we had a chat about the two different cities we lived in. I had visited the city she lived in, and she had visited Helsinki, and we thought about the different painting experiences that these cities offered for graffiti writers and street artists. I told her about the Stop töhryille -project and today's very different situation in Helsinki, where we now have districts such as the Pasila Street Art District. She replied that she had actually visited the district and had painted there as well. I was impressed, for I know that the international street artists that paint there are selected and invited exclusively by the Helsinki Urban Art organization which curates the art featured in the district, so I asked how she came into contact with the organization. She replied: "*What do you mean? I just painted there.*" Confused, I narrowed my question down to ask: "*Did you have a permission to paint there?*" My question must have seemed comical, for she laughed: "*Well, it's a legal place, right?*". Well, basically yes, but not exactly. I then tried to explain that the murals painted in this district are commissioned, and that the artists are invited and funded by the local organization, so the concrete walls of the district are thereby not considered as open to be painted by anyone. The situation became hilarious and we started laughing when we concluded that she in fact, without knowing, had painted an 'illegal' street art piece in a 'legally' labelled street art district.

Two months after the conference and another day at my office in the Pasila Street Art District, I decided to grab my lunch from a nearby small Thai restaurant that I regularly go to. As I walked to my lunch place, I suddenly spotted the street art piece painted by the artist that I talked to in Lisbon. I smiled when I recognized her character on a large concrete pole in front of the Thai restaurant, and then realized

that this art piece has persisted for a quite long time, despite being painted without permission. I studied the character for a moment, and then concluded that of all the street art pieces in this corner, I liked hers the most. Maybe because I met the artist, and perhaps because her art piece was illegal. Over a year, I regularly returned to my lunch place and her character welcomed me every time. And, while the nearby illegal 'CKR' graffiti pieces described in the Prologue were buffed twice during the same period, her character persisted on its concrete pole.

This thesis has explored the meanings of control and gender in Helsinki graffiti as two interrelated assemblages that dynamically create the social experience of the subculture. Helsinki graffiti is predominantly a male subculture which is dominated by a stylistic preference in graffiti (tags, throw-ups and graffiti pieces), that has rarely recognized women as active agents in its history, and that has often excluded the emerging street art scene from its subcultural distinctions. I have primarily traced the criminal context of graffiti writing and the meanings it creates to the gendered imaginations of the graffiti writing body. My intention is to demonstrate that gender diversity in Helsinki graffiti has potentially always been present, but that it has been reduced by a belief that gender should be 'seen', and when not seen, then imagined as 'male'. In the context of illegal art in public space, it is expected that the acting body will be masked to avoid sanctions, and that as masked, the body could potentially be 'anyone'. Yet, as this thesis has shown, crime control as a dynamic force tends to read bodies writing graffiti in masculine terms. Indeed, the purpose of this study has been to point out how the rigid control apparatus against graffiti has reduced the recognition of a more diverse performativity in the subculture, and that crime control ideologies such as zero tolerance may give rise to a legacy of ongoing effects which reconstruct the subcultural narrative as a place for the heterosexually masculine, whilst discounting other sexualities, genders, and stylistic performances in the subculture.

Throughout this study I have drawn on a cultural criminological perspective on subcultures, with an emphasis on feminist perspective. Cultural criminology typically explores the interplay of meaning, power, crime, and crime control in everyday experience, and often investigates the criminalization processes of subcultures by immersed ethnographies (Ferrell 2013). Moreover, cultural criminology engages with the spectacle of subcultural deviancy and explores its relevance for the mundane in late modernity (Presdee 2000; Young 2011). Subcultures thereby often become

‘culturally dignified’ after a marked event of marginalization or a period of criminalization, which comes to mark the subculture as a fascinating spectacle of the rebel, a promise for something different in the urban mundane and thereby as economically worthy to invest in. Consequently, a ‘criminalization event’ in the *past* is meaningful for the *present*, and in the case of Helsinki graffiti, zero tolerance has underscored its current cultural value as a celebrated urban culture in the city. Stop töhryille -project has indeed become the grand narrative of Helsinki graffiti, both in subcultural story-telling and from the city’s policy approach. Thus, its history can be divided into three phases referring to the zero tolerance period; first as a *pioneering subculture* in the pre-zero tolerance between the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, a *criminalized subculture* over the zero tolerance period between 1998 – 2008, and finally as a *celebrated subculture* in the ongoing post-zero tolerance period since 2009.

I have employed a methodology of urban ethnography, and developed a method of ‘spotting’ graffiti and street art on different urban surfaces as a form of edgework (e.g. Publication I; III; IV, p. 14 – 17). I have also engaged in female-only street art projects and municipality led graffiti workshops as a way to deepen the epistemology of marginalized subjects in the male-dominated Helsinki graffiti scene (Publication II). My own background as a female loner in the male-dominated graffiti subculture has been both a virtue and a challenge for doing an ethnography that aims to recognize controlling structures and gender relations in the subculture. When I started to conduct my fieldwork in 2011, I already had access to the predominantly male scene of train writers and those who engage in illicit forms of letter-based graffiti, and for a long time I thought that Helsinki graffiti was about this. However, from 2013 when I was employed to work for a female-only graffiti and street art workshop, my narrowed vision expanded to encompass street art as one of the emerging styles of Helsinki graffiti, and to recognize its power in creating a significant feminist scene in the subculture. During the forthcoming years, I was also able to locate several female graffiti writers who shared a similar ‘loner’ history as my own, within male writers’ circles. Gradually, a growing female scene of graffiti writers and street artists have then taken place at the city’s different surfaces. While a minority of female writers painting graffiti illegally keep a low profile and avoid publicity, larger feminist-oriented street art collectives, such as Mimmit peinttaa, have been particularly successful in publicly working for a more gender equal scene. Albeit sharing a minority status within a male-dominated subculture, the female

scene is not a unified scene, rather it represents many different interests in subcultural styles and in various forms of graffiti writing and street art.

My thesis has only in limited ways studied street art and its relevance for the feminist movement in Helsinki graffiti (Publication II), as I have focused mainly on tracing the criminal context of graffiti writing and its impact on gender structures in the subculture. It is of course debatable as to whether it is reasonable to study street art as part of Helsinki graffiti's criminalization narrative, when both street artists and graffiti writers tend to separate these art forms to different fields (Publication II). Street art is a fairly new phenomenon, and whilst it lacks a precise definition, it is often approached as less subcultural and as something different to illegal graffiti. Street art is often related to legal mural paintings, and is not associated with the Finnish concepts of 'töhrä' (graffiti vandalism) and 'töhrijä' (graffiti vandal), or for that matter the 'habitual graffiti vandal' (tapatöhrijä) and the 'occasional graffiti vandals' (satunnaistöhrijä). On the other hand, the law on criminal damage described in Chapter 6 does not distinguish between unauthorized art forms, though, of the two, it is graffiti that bears a criminal image, whilst street art seems to encounter only minor legal sanctions.

The separation between street art and graffiti is thereby not only the result of the subculture's own value system but is also a consequence to how society tends to differentiate the two. Thus, an 'event of criminalization', such as the Stop töhrylle – project, has a power to signify the subcultural subject, while separating the 'other' to the periphery of the subculture. It is in this way that gender hierarchies in Helsinki graffiti are constructed today chiefly between a 'masculine graffiti' over a 'feminine street art' (Publication I; II; III). Moreover, the division between legal street art and illegal graffiti marks another illusionary distinction between feminine and masculine subcultural symbols in public space, which contains women into controlled places, such as legal street art projects and municipal youth work at legal walls, whilst assuming an inherent resistance among male writers engaging in more illicit forms of graffiti - despite the fact that the majority of the users of legal walls in Helsinki are in fact ageing male writers (Helin 2014), and that both women and men paint illegally (Publication I; Publication II). To conclude my thoughts on street art as an important feminist movement on the city's urban surfaces, there is a clear necessity to further study the history of *Helsinki street art* in its own terms, and not simply as subordinated to graffiti.

I would like to underline some concluding observations on the crime control of graffiti from a practical point of view. *First*, the graffiti subculture in Helsinki has confronted an extraordinarily tough control policy over the decade between 1998 – 2008. There is no other Finnish youth subculture that has been systematically criminalized by a municipal led zero tolerance project over a ten-year long period, and with a total budget of 23.5 million euros. These costs exclude graffiti writers' and street artists' defeats in court rooms and the social consequences of the zero-tolerance project. It is reasonable to state that the zero tolerance period has left a social legacy for a generation of graffiti writers, who are predominantly males born between the late 1970s and the early 1990s. Their youth was seriously affected by massive court cases, police operations with specific graffiti units, the mass media hunting of graffiti writers, and the private security companies' investments in the city's combat against graffiti. Several male writers reported their brutal experiences of police actions from a very young age, and expressed a deep rage against the controlling system. This rage was also collectivized in several civic demonstrations organized between 2004 – 2008 to protest against the city's zero tolerance policy. Moreover, the rage against the security company FPS was expressed in a particularly homophobic discourse, which in parallel also underlined heterosexuality as a norm for the subculture.

Second, in my field observations between 2011 - 2019, I recorded only six cases where a female graffiti writer encountered the police. In four of these cases the informant was taken to the police station, but none of these individuals were apprehended for a longer period than a single night. In three of the cases, a minor fine was given at a district court for criminal damage, and in three of the cases, the informant stated that they did not receive any economic sanction. Two of these three informants reported that they were apprehended by the police together with male peer(s), but that they were instructed by the police to go home, while their male peers were arrested for graffiti writing. One individual was released after a police interrogation with no further actions. Female writers' experience of crime control suggest that they have fewer problems with the law than their male peers, and that they face milder forms of crime control from 'outside' the subculture. However, this is not the case 'inside' the male-dominated subculture. Helsinki graffiti create specific forms of control drawn by heterosexism, that seem to isolate women from one another. Thus, when we account the juncture of gender and control, we must begin to read stories of control in more multiple terms than albeit in formal control and

engage with a variety of different narratives of informal control. In particular, we need to dismantle how the control itself operates on conservative gender ideologies not only from above, but also inside the subculture.

Third, I would like to offer a general comment on researching the subcultural experience of control and city policies. It is crucial that such research is located within a history of social and cultural change in both national and international developments. As described in Chapter 2, the Stop töhrylle -project was introduced in parallel to a Nordic zero tolerance stance against graffiti, which must be read as part of a larger neo-conservative wave in late 1990s Nordic crime policy, which had a particular focus on youth in public space (e.g. Høigård 2011; Koskela 2009; Korander 2014). However, the broader social, cultural, and economic changes in Finnish society, or for that matter the debates about gender equality in Nordic welfare states, or the moralization of youth as a category, are less discussed in this thesis. Nonetheless, two things are worth highlighting as relevant for future research. In parallel to when graffiti became popular among Helsinki's youth in 1990s, Finland experienced its worst economic recession in the modern era (between 1990 – 1993). As a result, economic life suffered and social tensions increased, and the democratic welfare state was in crisis. In the context of joining the European Union in 1995 and Helsinki's nomination for the European Cultural Capital in 2000, my suggestion is that graffiti became a necessary symbol of unwanted dirt and decay in a time when the Finnish society was rising from economic repression, and moreover struggling for recognition as a 'world city' (i.e. Georgiou 2013; Lähteenmaa & Mäkelä 1995). Another important theme for future investigations of Helsinki graffiti would be the recent historical changes in gender structures in Finnish society, for example in relation to concepts such as 'Nordic girlhood' (e.g. Formark, et. al. 2017) and its role for deviant and urban subcultures which often are described in masculine terms. Young women's participation in male-dominated subcultures, above all, is a truly understudied area.

I wish to sum up this conclusion by returning to the scholarly literature on graffiti subcultures reviewed in Chapter 2, and by suggesting a further development for subcultural analysis by referring to some of the conclusions in Publications I, II and III. To start with, research on *graffiti as a youth subculture* has often emphasized the notion of the graffiti career, in which a young writer as a 'toy' begins with tagging, and pushes forward in learning more complex painting skills in order to achieve the highest status of 'king' in the subculture. This includes the proliferation of one's

graffiti name by painting as much as possible to ‘get up’, and to achieve ‘fame’. The notion of the career path, as a social learning process, was employed by early graffiti scholars who studied the graffiti writing culture among urban youth of color, and who framed graffiti writing as an alternative social activity to gang membership in 1970s New York (Castleman 1982; Lachman 1988; Stewart 2009). Indeed, the graffiti career path is still often accentuated by the US graffiti scholars and the literature often suggests a potential to a conventional career outside the subculture as an idealized outcome of the toy-king process, that capitalizes subcultural capital or ‘fame’ to gain culturally oriented employment and thus benefits economic welfare of the individual (e.g. Bloch 2019; Lachman 1982, 145 – 148; Macdonald 2002, 179 – 227; Snyder 2009, 147 – 190).

My thesis has not systematically assessed the notion of the career path, but I have attempted to problematize the concept of fame as the highest motivation for participating in the subculture in Publications I - III, by demonstrating that fame is built on a masculine competition that also reinforces a gender hierarchy between men and women (Publication II), and by arguing that making a graffiti name in zero tolerance milieus, alongside efforts to remove graffiti and increased crime sanctions for writers, engenders different prospects for visibility and the formation of the ‘graffiti self’ (Publications I, III). Indeed, other graffiti scholars have also problematized the concept of fame, by noting that when fame is attributed to female writers, this is often valorized in accordance with their sexual reputation (Macdonald 2002; see also Publication II), or by observing that the contemporary meaning of fame in online contexts has radically altered older notions of fame based on straightforward street visibility (MacDowall 2019; see also Publications I; III).

Notwithstanding the concerns raised by these critical scholars, fame is still much awarded as the subculture’s ruling economy within the literature, whilst less emphasis has been given to other emotional desires within the subculture, such as friendship, longing and love. This comment is raised here to counterbalance the tendency to see the graffiti path and the competition of fame as a one-sided chronological track, which suppresses the potential for approaching graffiti subculture in more diversified ways, such as writing graffiti with your romantic partner, starting graffiti as an adult, learning graffiti in a workshop, writing graffiti as a parent, or writing graffiti with your own child. The uncritical notion of fame seeks a blatant causality of graffiti writing and neglects to consider that those participating in subcultures are often already unequally positioned and have different opportunities for transforming

subcultural capital into economic benefit. And, for that matter, we should not assume that all writers are emotionally motivated by same things and experience control in the same way, or that graffiti subcultures are constantly similar in every city. City policies change and new generations of urban activists, graffiti writers and street artists constantly transform and colonize graffiti subculture in the most imaginative ways.

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PUBLICATION

I

Graffitieto – Etnografinen tutkimus graffitimaalareiden alakulttuurista

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GRAFFITITIETO – ETNOGRAFINEN TUTKIMUS GRAFFITIMAALAREIDEN ALAKULTTUURISTA

Tiivistelmä: Nykyinen graffititutkimus kulttuurisen kriminologian valossa pyrkii analysoimaan alakulttuurin ja yhteiskunnan välistä keskustelua. Tämän viitekehyksen ohjaamana artikkelissa pohditaan, miten graffitialakulttuurin pääoma rakentuu alakulttuurisen tiedon kautta nollatoleranssiympäristössä. Tutkimuksen metodologinen lähestymistapa on etnografinen. Aineisto koostuu muistiinpanoista ja kokemuksista lähinnä junagraffiteja harrastavien kentästä vuosina 2011 ja 2012. Kentälle pääsy on osittain tapahtunut niin kutsutun etnografisen ääriyöskentelyn myötä, jossa graffitimaalareiden kanssa on kuvattu junagraffiteja asemilla ja radanvarsilla. Luvaton graffitit ja nollatoleranssia tarkastellessa feimin käsite alakulttuurisena näkyvyytenä nousee analyysin keskiöön. Junagraffitien kohtaaminen ja kuvaamiseen liittyvät käytännöt rakensivat alakulttuurista tietoa junaliikenteestä, jonka avulla graffitimaalarit tiesivät missä ja milloin oli mahdollista maalata junia. Lisäksi, graffitikuvien julkaisemiseen liittyvät neuvottelut rakensivat kontrolloitua feimiä. Tutkimus osoittaa, että kontrollin vuorovaikutuksessa graffitimaalarit ovat löytäneet luovia ratkaisuja, joissa feimi ei näyttäydy sellaisena yksinkertaisena arvostetun toimijuuden muotona, kuin mitä nollatoleranssiteorian valossa on annettu ymmärtää.

Avainsanat: graffiti(ala)kulttuuri, nollatoleranssi, alakulttuurinen pääoma, kulttuurinen kriminologia, etnografia

Johdanto

Helsingin alueelle 1980-luvun puolivälissä rantautunut graffitikulttuuri yritettiin kitkeä kymmenen vuoden aikana graffitienvastaisen projektin avulla. Stop töhryille -projekti toimi Helsingin rakennusviraston (HKR¹) alaisuudessa vuodesta 1998, kunnes se vuonna 2008 lopetettiin. Kampanjan viimeisiin vaiheisiin liittyi monenlaisia jännitteitä. Kaupunginvaltuutettuja ei päästetty projektin kymmenvuotisjuhlaseminaariin Finlandia-taloon ja Kiasman edessä järjestettiin samaan aikaan seminaarin kanssa vastatapahtuma Töhryfest. Töhryfest päättyi poliisin ja mielenosoittajien yhteenottoihin ja 27 mielenosoittajaa otettiin kiinni. Silloisen rikoksentorjuntaneuvoston jäsen *Hannu Takala* vaati Helsingin Sanomissa (17.9.2008) puolueetonta tutkimusta projektin vaikutuksista. Projektia oli ohjannut nollatoleranssiin perustuva ote graffiteja vastaan ja projekti joutui mediassa huonoon valoon.

Projektin viimeisinä vuosina tutustuin erääseen pääkaupunkiseudun graffitimaalareiden ryhmään. He muodostivat löyhän ryhmän, eivätkä kaikki kuuluneet samaan ”crewiin”², mutta he jakoivat samankaltaisen arvopohjan ja toimintatavat graffitien harrastamisessa. Nämä graffitimaalarit ”bongailivat”³ juna- ja metroradan varsilla graffitimaalauksiaan milloin juni-

- 1 HKR on Helsingin kaupungin rakennusvirasto, joka vastaa katujen, vihialueiden ja kaupungin toimitilojen suunnittelusta, rakentamisesta ja hoidosta (www.hel.fi/hki/HKR/fi/Viraston+esittely+ja+ty_paiikat, 28.8.2014).
- 2 Crewi (eng. crew) = graffitimaalareiden muodostama yhteenliittymä, jonka tarkoitus on tehdä graffiteja yhteisellä nimellä.
- 3 Bongata = alakulttuurisessa slangissa huomata, nähdä graffiti jossakin julkisessa tilassa.

en kyljissä, milloin seinissä. Näille nuorille miehille kokemukset poliisikuulusteluista ja tutkintavankeuksista sekä tuomiot suurista vahingonkorvauksista olivat arkipäivää. Ryhmä voidaan määritellä osaksi graffitien harrastajien alakulttuuria, jossa harrastetaan New Yorkissa 1960-luvun lopulla kehittyneeseen kirjaimiin perustuvia graffiteja (ks. esim. *Helin* 2014, s. 13, 24–26). Tutkimuksessani viittaan alakulttuurin, koska sen teoreettinen viitekehys mahdollistaa kriittisen analyysin nuoria ja poikkeavuutta tutkittaessa, ottaen huomioon kontekstin sosiaaliset, historialliset ja poliittiset tilanteet (*Blackman* 2014, s. 508). Alakulttuureja on jäsennelly teoreettisesti nuorten ja muiden marginaalissa olevien ryhmien valtarakenteisiin ja valtaapitäviin kohdistuvana kapinointina, jossa luodaan vaihtoehtoisia kulttuureja sosiaaliselle eriarvoisuudelle (mt.). Graffitimaalarit, joita tutkin, olivat aloittaneet harrastuksensa kymmenvuotisen nollatoleranssin aikakautena, jolloin graffitien tekeminen Helsingin seudulla oli kiellettyä. Alakulttuuria tarkastellaan tutkimuksessa vastalauseena yhteiskunnan yliorganisoitumiselle (*Presdee* 2000, s. 9).

Graffititutkimuksessa on käytetty vaihtelevasti käsitteitä *graffitikulttuuri* (*Helin* 2014, *Malinen* 2013, s. 69) ja *graffitialakulttuuri* (*Ferrell* 1996, *Macdonald* 2002), eikä niiden välisistä eroista yleensä keskustella. Käsitteiden erojen tiedostaminen on kuitenkin tärkeää, koska ne viittaavat kahteen toisistaan eroavaan kulttuuriseen ilmiöön, vaikka itse taiteen muoto on sama. Näen graffitikulttuurin olevan käsitteenä graffitialakulttuuria laajempi, jolloin siihen kuuluu myös institutionaalinen taide, kuten gallerianäyttelyt ja luvallisten graffitien teko. Graffitialakulttuurilla viittaan taas graffitien luvattomaan tekoon ja sen ympärillä oleviin sosiaalisiin käytäntöihin. Usein graffitimaalari voi olla osa molempia kulttuurin muotoja, ja ne myös rakentuvat limittäin, muodostaen siltoja kulttuurien välille. Tarkastelen tässä pääasiassa graffitialakulttuuria, mutta graffitikulttuuri on kuitenkin tutkimuksessa läsnä, koska näiden kulttuurimuotojen välillä käydään jatkuvaa vuoropuhelua. Graffitikulttuurien moninaisuuden ymmärtäminen onkin tärkeää määriteltäessä graffitiin liittyvää kulttuurista pääomaa, joka rakentuu eri tavoin luvattoman ja luvallisen graffitin kohdalla.

Tässä artikkelissa tutkin graffitialakulttuurisen pääoman muotoa ja sen tuottamisen merkitystä graffitimaalajille silloin, kun graffiteja kontrolloidaan. Pohdin sitä, *miten graffitialakulttuurin pääoma rakentuu alakulttuurisen tiedon kautta nollatoleranssiympäristössä*. Esittelen seuraavaksi graffititutkimuksen kehitystä kohti kulttuurista kriminologiaa sekä Suomessa kirjoitettuja tutkimuksia, jonka jälkeen pohdin nollatoleranssin ja alakulttuurisen pääoman käsitteitä rikoksensoriuntakontekstissa. Tämän jälkeen käsitteelen tutkimuksen etnografista lähestymistapaa ja kentälle menemisen neuvottelua. Analyysissa erottelen erilaisia graffitimaalareiden tapoja tuottaa alakulttuurista tietoa, jotka muodostavat eräänlaista graffititietoa nollatoleranssin kontekstissa. Pohdin lopuksi johtopäätöksien yhteydessä graffitin nykyistä tilaa Helsingissä menneisyyden valossa.

Graffititutkimus kulttuurisen kriminologian viitekehyksessä

Kulttuurista kriminologiaa kehittänyt *Jeff Ferrell* (1996, 1998) on kansainvälisen graffititutkimuksen tähänhetkinen ykkösnimi. Hänen tutkimuksensa graffiteista eivät pyri ainoastaan analysoimaan graffitimaalareiden motiiveja, vaan ne kuvaavat myös graffitialakult-

tuurin ja yhteiskunnan vastakkainasetteluja sekä näiden välisiä konflikteja. *Nancy Macdonald* (2002) on puolestaan tutkinut, kuinka luvattomien graffitien tekeminen toimii alakulttuurisen toiminnan jatkamisen edellytyksenä, samalla kun sen rakenteet tukevat maskuliinisen identiteetin rakentumista graffitimaalareiden keskuudessa. Myös Oslon yliopiston kriminologian ja oikeussosiologian professori *Cecilie Høigård* (2007) tekee samantyyppisiä tulkintoja teoksessaan ”Gategallerier”. Høigården (2007, s. 453) mukaan laittomuus on keskeistä graffitialakulttuurille sekä sen rakenteille, ja juuri laittomuuden avulla sen on ollut mahdollista rakentaa ja kehittää omanlaistaan alakulttuurista toimintaa, samalla kun nollatoleranssi on rakentanut graffitimaalajat rikolliseksi nuorisoluokaksi. Edellä mainitut graffititutkimukset tarkastelevat graffiteja ja niiden hallintaa koskevaa politiikkaa dynaamisena ilmiönä, joka on kulttuurisen kriminologian teoriasuuntaukselle ominainen tapa analysoida rikollisuutta (*Ferrel – Hayward – Mornison – Presdee* 2004, *Honkatukia – Suurpää* 2007, s. 10).

Graffitikulttuurin yhteiskuntatieteellinen tutkimus on Suomessa kehittynyt sykleissä. Ennen pääkaupunkiseudun nollatoleranssiaikaa on tehty joitakin graffiteihin liittyviä tutkimuksia (esim. *Lähteenmaa* 1991, *Isomursu – Jääskeläinen* 1998), mutta Stop töhryille -projektin aikana graffiteja tutkittiin taas hyvin vähän. Tämä voi antaa viitteitä siitä, että yhteiskunnallinen keskustelu graffiteista on ollut vaikeaa Suomessa projektin aikana. Projektin päätyttyä yhteiskunnallinen keskustelu onkin ollut avoimempaa ja kiinnostus graffitikulttuurin tutkimiseen on jälleen lisääntynyt (esim. *Helin* 2014, *Komonen* 2012, *Koskela* 2009, *Malinen* 2011).

Nykyaikainen graffitikulttuurin tutkimus pyrkii tarkastelemaan graffitien tekemiseen liittyvää toimijuutta osana alakulttuurin ja yhteiskunnan välisenä keskusteluna tai keskustelemattomuutena. *Hille Koskela* (2009) on analysoinut nollatoleranssiprojektien kaltaista politiikkaa ja nuorisokulttuurien kriminalisointia. Käsite *graffitisota* on sittemmin esiintynyt tutkimuksissa, joissa tarkastellaan kaupunkitilan hallinnointia ja sen vastarintaa (*Hirvonen* 2011, s. 299). Tällöin graffitien vastainen taistelu nähdään pyrkimyksenä tuottaa järjestystä ja kuria kaupunkitilaan. Näissä tutkimuksissa graffitikulttuuri hahmotetaan yhteiskunnallisena kysymyksenä ja analysoidaan sitä, minkälaisia rikoksentorjuntamenetelmiä nuorisokulttuurisia ilmiöitä kohtaan suunnataan ja miten nuoria ylipäättänsä pitäisi kohdata yhteiskunnassa. Tutkittaessa nuorisokulttuurien ja valtaväestön välistä konfliktia kulttuurisen kriminologian näkökulmasta rikoksentorjunnan ja turvallisuuden edistämisen tulisi rakentua kulttuuriseen ymmärrykseen, moniarvoisuuteen ja ennakoluulojen karsimiseen (*Koskela* 2009, s. 232). Kulttuurinen kriminologia pyrkii välttämään turhaa sääntelyä ja sellaiset kulttuuriset toiminnot ja muodot, jotka eivät vahingoita ketään tulisi sallia (*Koskela* 2009, s. 233).

Nykytilanne pääkaupunkiseudulla on varsin erilainen nollatoleranssin aikakauteen verrattuna ja luvallisiin graffiteihin asennoidutaan nykyään myönteisesti. Vuodesta 2009 Helsingissä on ollut luvallisia maalauspaikkoja ja vuonna 2014 kaupunki hallinnoi jo yhtätoista luvallista maalauspaikkaa⁴. Muuttuvasta graffitipolitiikasta kertoo *Mika Helinin* (2014) teos ”Luvallinen graffiti Helsingissä”, joka tutkii Helsingin kaupungin luvallisten graffitipaikko-

4 Tarkistettu 20.8.2014, /www.supafly.net/maalauspaikat/.

jen käyttäjiä. Tutkimus esittää graffitimaalareiden moninaisuutta niin, että heidän sijoittaminen ainoastaan rikollisuus- tai nuorisokategoriaan on käynyt vaikeaksi.

Alakulttuurinen pääoma

Pierre Bourdieu (1986) on kehittänyt termejä kuvaamaan yhteiskunnan eri pääomatyyppejä, joita ovat taloudellinen, kulttuurinen, sosiaalinen sekä symbolinen pääoma. Taloudellinen pääoma viittaa omaisuuteen ja materiaaliseen tuotantoon, kun taas kulttuurinen pääoma on osa ihmisen tuottamia kulttuurisia arvoja, kuten esimerkiksi perinteisiin ja koulutukseen viittaavia tietoja ja taitoja. Sosiaalinen pääoma viittaa verkostoitumiseen ja siihen, kuka tuntee kenet. Symbolinen pääoma ilmentää tilaa, joksi muut pääoman muodot tulevat legitimoituksaan yhteiskunnassa. Kulttuurisen pääoman on siten oltava yhteiskunnassa laillista, jotta se voisi tuottaa symbolista pääomaa. Bourdieun pääoman muodot ovat yksilöille eräänlaisia resursseja, jotka muodostavat järjestelmiä ja valtarakenteita. Näissä ilmenee konflikteja eri sosiaalisissa kentissä, joissa maku ja tyyli merkitsevät yhteiskuntaluokkaa.

Sarah Thornton (1997) lanseerasi alakulttuurinen pääoma -käsitteen, jonka avulla hän tarkasteli Ison-Britannian rave- ja klubikulttuuria. Käsitteen lähtökohtana ovat Bourdieun yhteiskunnan eri pääomatyyppit. Thorntonin käsitys alakulttuurisesta pääomasta muodostuu alakulttuurisesta tiedosta, joka kehittyy alakulttuurisen menestyksen myötä ja siten vahvistaa alakulttuurista statusta. Alakulttuurinen tieto tarkoittaa tietoa siitä, kuka ja mikä on ”in”. Vaikka Thornton (1997, s. 201) myöntää yhteiskunnassa olevan luokkakonflikteja, ne eivät hänen mukaansa lähtökohtaisesti ole edellytys alakulttuurille. Thorntonille (1997, s. 204) alakulttuurin ero valtakulttuurista on pikemminkin ikä- ja sukupuolikysymys kuin luokkakysymys. Luokkakysymyksellä tarkoitin tässä marxilaista tapaa tarkastella alakulttuureja, jossa ne ovat seuraus yhteiskuntaluokkien välisestä konfliktista. Thorntonia onkin kritisoitu siitä, että hän ei kiinnittä tarpeeksi huomiota analyysissään alakulttuuristen jäsenten sosiaaliseen asemaan tai yhteiskuntajärjestelmän tekijöihin (*Jensen* 2006, *Skeggs* 2004, s. 150).

Alakulttuurinen pääoma on Thorntonin (1997, s. 203) mukaan, Bourdieun kulttuurisen pääoman tavoin, aina mahdollista muuntaa taloudelliseksi pääomaksi. *Beverley Skeggsin* (2004) mukaan alakulttuurinen pääoma on kuitenkin aina luokkasidonnaista eikä kaikilla ole samanlaisia mahdollisuuksia muuntaa pääomaa lailliseksi ja siten taloudelliseksi, koska sosiaaliset ja pääoman verkostot ovat harvemmin kaikille yhtäläiset. Siksi Skeggsin (2004, s. 150) mukaan lähinnä keskiluokkaiset kykenevät hyödyntämään alakulttuurista pääomaa, vaikka se olisikin syntynyt työväenluokan piirissä. Esimerkkinä tästä voidaan esittää punk-liikkeen ”kuolema” ja kaupallistuminen 1980-luvulla. Punk-liike pyrki aluksi erottautumaan valtakulttuurista, mutta popularisoinnin myötä markkinatalous on tunkeutunut alakulttuurin rakenteisiin, jonka seurauksena punk-musiikkia ja -muotia myytiin nuorille suunnattuina kulutushyödykkeinä (ks. esim. *McRobbie* 1994, *Clark* 2003). Kaikkia alakulttuureja ei aina Skeggsin mukaan ole kuitenkaan mahdollista muuntaa taloudelliseksi hyödykkeeksi, varsinkin jos alakulttuuriset jäsenet kapinoivat kaupallistumista vastaan.

Luvallisen ja luvattoman graffitin välillä käydään jatkuvaa alakulttuurista keskustelua. Luvattomien graffitien kannattajien mukaan graffitien yhteiskunnallinen hyväksyntä johtaa

alakulttuurin taloudelliseen hyödyntämiseen. Macdonaldin (2002, s. 173) tutkimuksessa olleet graffitimaalarit pitivät etäisyyttä institutionaaliseen graffitiin puolustaessaan alakulttuuriaan kaupallistumiselta. Tätä Macdonald (2002, s. 170) kutsuu *etäisyyden strategiaksi* (engl. *strategy of distance*), joka on graffitialakulttuurille keskeinen keino selviytyä kaupallistumiselta ja pyrkimys autenttisuuteen. Tällä tavalla graffitimaalarit rakentavat oman yhteisönsä vaihtoehtoisena kulttuurina valtakulttuurin ulkopuolelle. Alakulttuurin normit ja säännöt eivät tule ymmärretyiksi ulkopuolisille ja siksi sen jäsenet voivat muodostaa itsestään tietoa, jonka merkitystä ja käyttöä voidaan hyödyntää vain alakulttuurin piirissä. Yhteiskunnan hyväksyntä olisi uhka alakulttuurille, jonka valta koostuu luvattomuudesta. Luvattomasti maalaavat graffitimaalarit saavat Macdonaldin (2002, s. 173) mukaan merkityksensä juuri siitä vallasta, joka pohjautuu graffiteja kohtaan suunnattuun paheksuntaan. Tällöin valtakulttuurissa ei nähdä graffittille käyttöarvoa eikä sen alakulttuuriin liitetä taloudellista arvoa.

Alakulttuurinen pääoma -käsite on liitetty niin kutsuttuun jälkialakulttuuriseen keskusteluun, joka liittyy alakulttuuritutkimuksen postmodernististen suuntauksien ilmenemiseen (Blackman 2014, s. 504). Kulttuurinen kriminologia on sittemmin pyrkinyt erottautumaan postmodernistisesta alakulttuuritutkimuksesta, sillä sen on nähty painottavan alakulttuurisen identiteetin analysointia kulutushyödykkeen tavoin (Blackman 2014, s. 506). Tällöin kriittinen tutkimus sosiaalisesta eriarvoisuudesta myöhäiskapitalismissa jää alakulttuuritutkimuksessa vähemmälle huomiolle. Puhuttaessa alakulttuurisesta pääomasta tärkeäksi kysymykseksi nousee, *mikä* on alakulttuurista pääomaa ja *kuka* sekä *miten* sitä pystyy hyödyntämään taloudellisesti? Toisin sanoen, on tutkittava niitä mekanismeja, jotka mahdollisesti muuntavat alakulttuurisen pääoman taloudelliseksi, koska se kertoo siitä, kuinka eri pääomatyypit ovat jakautuneet yhteiskunnassa.

Nollatoleranssi rikoksentorjuntamenetelmänä

Nollatoleranssin rikoksentorjuntamenetelmä on lähtöisin *Georg Kellingin* ja *James Q. Wilsonin* (1982) julkaisemasta artikkelista “The police and neighbourhood safety: Broken windows” ja teoriaa on myöhemmin kehitetty lisää kirjassa “Fixing broken windows” (Kelling – Coles 1997). Rikkinäisten ikkunoiden teorian, tai niin kutsutun New Yorkin -mallin mukaan yhteiskunnan on aktiivisesti ja voimakkaasti taisteltava kaikkea pikkurikollisuutta vastaan, sillä piittaamattomuus johtaa vakavampiin rikoksiin. Nollatoleranssijattelussa alueet, joissa pahamaineiset katujengit, alkoholistit ja prostituoidut hyväksytään, rakentaa pohjaa järjestäytyneelle rikollisuudelle. Siksi kaikkea rikollisuutta vastaan on taisteltava mahdollisimman tehokkaasti ja nopeasti poliisin, vartiointin ja kovien rangaistusten avulla. Tällaisen mallin ensisijaisena kohteena ovat ennen kaikkea järjestyksrikkomukset.

Jock Young (2011, s. 111–130) on kritisoinut nollatoleranssiteorian tapaa tarkastella rikollisuutta, ja jossa uskotaan rikollisuuden torjunnan onnistuvan yksinkertaisella tavalla. Nollatoleranssi on poliittisessa retoriikassa selkeä ja helposti lähestyttävä ratkaisu, jossa rikollisuus nähdään yhteiskunnasta erillisenä ilmiönä, ja siksi sitä on helppo markkinoida. Todellisuudessa rikollisuus on moniulotteista, eikä sen torjuminen voi tapahtua pelkästään rikoksentorjunnan kautta, vaan pikemminkin yhteiskunnallisiin rakenteisiin vaikuttamalla ja

hyvinvointivaltiota kehittämällä. Hyvinvointipolitiikassa on kuitenkin *David Garlandin* (2001) mukaan tapahtumassa muutos kohti järjestys- ja turvallisuuspolitiikkaa, jossa yhteiskunnallisia ongelmia ei mielletä rakenteellisina, vaan ne yksinkertaistetaan kontrollin puutteesta johtuviksi anomaliioiksi.

Taidehistorioitsija *Jacob Kimwallin* (2012, s. 21–22) mukaan nollatoleranssin toteuttaminen graffiteja vastaan rakentuu neljän tukipilarin varaan. Siihen kuuluu (1) graffitien systemaattinen ja tehokas poisto sekä julkisissa että yksityisissä tiloissa, (2) rikosoikeudellisten keinojen tiukentaminen graffitien ehkäisemiseksi ja (3) laillisten graffitien kieltäminen. Neljäntenä ja perustavimpana tukipilarina Kimwall esittää propagandan, joka toteutetaan projektin tai kampanjan muodossa. Näiden pyrkimyksenä on päästä vaikuttamaan ihmisten tietouteen graffiteista jakamalla tietoa ”töhrintäongelmasta” ja markkinoimalla tehokkaita menetelmiä sen ehkäisemiseksi. Projektit toteutetaan usein yhteistyössä kaupungin, joukkoliikenteen ja poliisin kanssa. Tukholmassa vuonna 1998 nollatoleranssia esiteltiin yhtenä keinona pohjoismaisessa graffitien vastaisessa konferenssissa, johon osallistui edustajia myös Suomesta (*Väisänen* 1998). Konferenssissa New Yorkista kutsutut poliisit luennoivat nollatoleranssimenetelmästä graffiteja vastaan. Samana vuonna Helsingissä perustettiin graffitien kitkemiseksi Stop töhryille -projekti, jonka menettelytavaksi muodostui nollatoleranssi. Helsingissä projektin aikana kaikki Kimwallin esittämät nollatoleranssin neljä tukipilaria olivat nähtävissä, vaikka nollatoleranssia ei varsinaisesti esitetty projektin julkisena linjauksena (ks. *Mäkinen* 2010, s. 58–60).

Nollatoleranssiprojektit ovat Suomessa saaneet mittavan aseman kaupunkien turvallisuussuunnitteluissa eikä graffitilakulttuuri ole ainoa ilmiö, jota vastaan on taisteltu nollatoleranssin keinoin. Muun muassa *Timo Korander* ja *Seppo Soine-Rajanummi* (2002) ovat tutkineet nollatoleranssipolitiikkaa julkijuopottelua vastaan Tampereella ja osoittaneet, että tämänkaltaiset projektit kohdistuvat usein ryhmittymiin, joilla on vähiten vaikutusvaltaa yhteiskunnassa. Koskelan (2009, s. 280–282) mukaan nuorisokulttuurit ovat usein kriminaalipoliittisen kontrollin kohteena, koska rikosentorjunnassa tarvitaan helppoja vastustajia, jotta politiikka näyttäytyisi tehokkaana. Koskela kutsuu tätä pelon politiikaksi, jonka avulla luodaan uhkakuvia yhteiskunnalle ja markkinoidaan nollatoleranssipolitiikan kaltaisia rikosentorjuntamenetelmiä. Pelon politiikalla ei kriminalisoida pelkästään tiettyjä tekoja, vaan usein kohteena on kokonaisia kulttuureja (*Koskela* 2009, s. 284).

Stop töhryille -projektin yhteydessä voidaan puhua graffitikulttuurin kriminalisoinnista. Kulttuurien kriminalisoinnissa viitataan sen moninaiseen tapaan säännellä jotakin tekoa, esimerkiksi musiikin kuuntelua tai maalaamista väärässä paikassa (*Koskela* 2009, s. 284; *Presdee* 2000). Esimerkkinä graffitikulttuurin kriminalisoinnista on vuonna 2003 voimaan tullut järjestyslain 13 §, jossa säädetään, että ”*spraymaalien ja muiden toisen omaisuuden töhrimiseen hyvin soveltuvien maalien tai muiden aineiden hallussapito yleisellä paikalla ilman hyväksyttävää syytä on kielletty*”. Poliisille annettu määrittelyoikeus on ongelmallinen, sillä käytännössä poliisi päättää, onko kyseessä järjestyslain rikkominen sekä sakotetaanko spraymaalien hallussapidosta. Sakon vastustaminen on mahdollista, mutta mikäli syyte nostetaan oikeudessa, riskinä ovat oikeudenkäyntikulut (*Hirvonen* 2011).

Myös kielen politiikalla (ks. *Koskela* 2009, s. 287) pyritään vaikuttamaan kulttuurin kri-

minalisointiin. Stop töhryille -projektin aikana virkamiespuheessa graffitin sijaan käytettiin sanaa ”töhry”, jonka tarkoituksena oli kuvata teon laittomuutta. Töhry-sanan viittaus grafitiin onkin yleisessä kielessä vakiintunut vasta projektin aikana (Helin 2014, s.42). Oman lisäyksen on tuonut HKR:n kehittämä ”tapatöhrijiä”-termi. Projektin virkamies Kauko Nygrén määritteli termin näin: ”*Tapatöhrijiä ovat aikuisia miehiä, jotka sotkevat seiniä, katukalusteita, busseja ja kaikkea mahdollista huvikseen ilman varsinaista motiivia.*” (HS 20.2.2007). Graffitin kriminalisointia koskevia muita esimerkkejä ovat Kiasman graffitinäyttelyn sulkeminen ja luvallisten graffitimaalauksien poistaminen kaupunkitalasta (Koskela 2008, s. 290–291). Vastaavanlaisia tapauksia on Tukholmasta, jossa kaupunki on kieltäytynyt vuokraamasta tilojaan ”töhrintään”⁵ liittyvään toimintaan (Kimwall 2012, s. 81–93).

Vaikka Stop töhryille -projekti on virallisesti lopetettu vuonna 2008, sen poliittiset linjat ovat osittain jatkuneet ”Siisti Stadi” -projektissa (ks. esim. Helin 2014, s. 49–53). Tämä näkyy esimerkiksi siinä, että sovitteluihin graffitimaalajien kanssa ei suostuta, ellei tekijä ole ensikertalainen tai alaikäinen. Myös HKR:n määrittelemä tapatöhrijiä-luokittelu estää pääsyn sovitteluun (Brunila – Ranta – Viren 2011, s. 114). Vaikka Helsingin kaupunki ei enää toteuteta Kimwallin esittämää totalitääristä nollatoleranssia, projektin yhteiskunnalliset vaikutukset ovat pitkäkestoisempia, esimerkiksi suuriin vahingonkorvauksiin tuomittujen graffitimaalareiden kohdalla. Lisäksi VR⁶ ei ole missään vaiheessa luopunut nollatoleranssista (Ylen uutiset 28.9.2009). Nollatoleranssin voi nähdä diskurssina, jonka jatkuvuus ylittää paikallisuuteen liitetyn poliittisen asennoitumisen ja päätöksenteon.

Etnografinen lähestymistapa ja kentälle meneminen

Etnografiaa on määritelty monella eri tapaa ja määrittelyt vaihtelevat eri tieteenalojen välillä (Lappalainen 2007, s. 9). Etnografiaa voidaan pitää metodologiana, joka on ohjannut tutkimukseni kulkua ja tutkimusongelman muotoilua prosessimaisesti. Etnografisessa tutkimusprosessissa analyysi rakentuu limittäin aineiston, teorian ja tulkinnan vuorovaikutuksessa (Lappalainen 2007, s. 13). Se on tutkimusstrategia, joka tuo esille tutkimuksen teoreettiset ja poliittiset lähestymistavat sekä tutkijan käsitykset valtakysymyksistä, etiikasta ja vastuusta (Lander 2006, s. 26; Lappalainen 2007, s. 10; Skeggs 1997, s. 23). Tutkimukseni lähestymistapa on olennaisesti vaikuttanut omaan suhtautumiseeni graffitilakulttuuriin. Se on kriittisesti avannut näkökulmia siihen, kenelle graffiti kuuluu ja kuka sitä hallinnoi, sekä miten sen määrittely muuttuu sen ollessa luvallinen tai luvaton. Etnografiaa onkin kutsuttu tutkimusasenteeksi, joka on yhtälailla intellektuaalista tulkitsemista kuin moraalista asennoitumista paikkaan sidotussa kenttätöyssä (Hietala 2013, s. 36; Ortner 1995).

Etnografialle on ominaista kenttätöön tekeminen. Tutkija tutustuu tutkimuskohteeseensa ja opettelee toimimaan sen sosiaalisissa ja kulttuurisissa järjestyksissä. Siihen kuuluvat osallistuminen, havainnointi ja keskeisten kokemusten merkitykset (Lappalainen 2007, s.10-

5 Ruotsissa virkamiespuheessa ”klotter” vastaa sanaa töhry.

6 VR = VR Group on Suomen valtion omistama logistiikkakonserni, joka harjoittaa henkilö- ja tavaraliikennettä Suomen rauta- ja maanteillä.

11; *Atkinson – Coffey – Delamont – Lofland – Lofland* 2001 – *Skeggs* 2001, s. 426). Kulttuurin tutkimuksessa kentän määrittely on vaikeasti rajattavissa (*Malinen* 2011, s. 43), eikä tutkija voi yksiselitteisesti astua kulttuuriin tai poistua siitä, kuten huoneeseen astutaan tai siitä poistutaan. Samoin, tiukan rajan asettaminen kenttätöön ja analyysivaiheen välille on miltei mahdotonta (*Pink* 2001, s. 79). Käytän kuitenkin kenttä-käsitettä, koska se ilmentää eräänlaista tilaa tutkimusprosessissa, jonne tutkija pyrkii tuottaessaan aineistoa tutkittavasta kulttuurista (*Tolonen – Palmu* 2007, s. 89). Kenttätöön muodosta ja määrästä käydäänkin jatkuvaa keskustelua, samoin kuin siitä, mitä tutkimustyötä voidaan ylipäättänsä kutsua etnografiseksi (*Hammersley – Atkinson* 2007, s. 3; *Honkasalo* 2008). Tietoa ja materiaalia voidaan etnografisessa tutkimuksessa kerätä monella tavalla, mutta jonkinlaisena pääsääntönä voidaan pitää sitä, että tutkijan on vietettävä kentällä aikaa ja kirjoitettava kenttämuistiinpanoja tutkimastaan kulttuurista. Oman näkemykseni mukaan etnografinen tutkimustyö vaatii tutkijan aktiivista läsnäoloa kentällä ja osittain myös tutkittavaan kulttuuriin osallistumista jonkin tietyn ajanjakson ajan. Tällä tavalla tutkija voi ymmärtää tutkimiansa ilmiöitä tutkittavien keskuudessa sellaisella tavalla, johon muut lähestymistavat eivät pysty. Etnografisen tutkimuksen vahvuus onkin se, että tietoa kerätään niiden ihmisten parissa, joilla on ensikäden tietoa tutkittavasta kulttuurista (esim. *Puuronen* 2000, s. 215–216).

Kentälle meneminen voidaan kuvata eräänlaisena neuvotteluna, jonka tutkija käy kentän kanssa ansaitakseen paikkansa tutkittavien parissa (*Tolonen – Palmu* 2007, s. 89). Se on syytä kuvata, koska se kertoo tutkijan positiosta, eli suhteesta, tutkittavaan kenttään. Kiinnostuin graffiteista kotikaupungissani 2000-luvun alussa kun ystäväpiiriini alkoi kuulua graffitimaalareita. ”Helsingin-reissuilta” palatessaan graffitimaalarit kertoivat hurjia tarinoita sikäläisten maalareiden kokemuksista, vartiointiyrityksen menetelmistä ja nollatoleranssista. Myöhemmin muuttaessani Helsinkiin opiskelemaan sain yhteyden paikalliseen graffitimaalariin välittäessäni hänen tekemäänsä graffitilehteä kotikaupunkiini vuonna 2005. Kiinnostukseni graffitialakulttuuria kohtaan kasvoi, kun pikkuhiljaa tutustuin Kallion baareissa lehdentekijän ystäviin, jotka myös maalasivat graffiteja. Oli kiehtovaa kuunnella heidän kertomuksiaan ”juoksuista”⁷ ja rajoja rikkovasta tavasta maalata graffiteja luvottomasti juniin ja radanvarsille. Silloinen nollatoleranssipolitiikka ei vaikuttanut pysäyttävän graffitien maalaamista ja halusin tietää miksi. Tutkimukselle etnografia oli luonteva valinta, koska olin jo osittain kentän ”sisällä” ja sen huomioonjättäminen olisi ollut tutkimukselle lähtökohtaisesti väärin, sillä se määritteli suhdettani tutkimuskohteeseen.

Vaikka kentälle pääsy oli jo osittain tapahtunut, varsinaisen kenttätöön aloittaminen oli ajoittain vaikeaa. Graffitimaalareiden mukaan saaminen tutkimukseen ja etnografisten menetelmien selostaminen yhteisölle tuntui alussa hankalalta. Moni graffitimaalari suhtautui epäileväisesti tutkimukseeni, mikä ei ollut yllättävää. ”Ulkopuolisen” tahon kiinnostus yhteisön lakia rikkovaa toimintaa kohtaan saa kenen tahansa hälytyskellot soimaan. Eräänä käännekohtana voidaan kuitenkin pitää sitä, kun graffitimaalarit pyysivät minua kuvaamaan maalattuja junia ensimmäisen kerran syystalvella 2011. Junien valokuvaaminen oli heille tärkeää, koska sillä tavoin he pystyivät dokumentoimaan teoksiaan ennen kuin ne pestäisiin

7 Juoksu = tilanne, jossa oli joutunut juoksemaan pakoon vartijaa tai poliisia.

pois. Aloitin maalattujen junien kuvaamisen asemilla ja radanvarsilla yhdessä graffitimaalareiden kanssa. En siis itse ollut paikalla, kun junia maalattiin junien seisontapaikoilla tai rata-pihoilla, mutta olin mukana jälkeensä, kun junat olivat liikenteessä ja kuvien ottaminen julkisella paikalla oli mahdollista. Nämä kuvausreissut, jolloin maalattuja junia bongattiin, kestivät muutamasta tunnista pisimmillään viiteen tuntiin.

Kentän valokuvaaminen ei ollut alun perin suunnitelmassani, mutta tämä antoi minulle syyn olla mukana graffitimaalareiden kentällä. Tämä johti lopulta siihen, että sain viideltä graffitimaalarilta luvan kirjoittaa muistiinpanoja heidän kanssaan käymistäni keskusteluista. Heidät voidaan luonnehtia tutkimuksen informanteiksi tai kanssatutkijoiksi, jolla tarkoitetaan tutkimuksen tekemistä yhdessä tutkittavien kanssa. Kanssatutkijuutta on kuvattu tutkijan ja tutkittavien välisenä vuorovaikutuksena, jossa tunnustetaan tutkittavien oma erityisosaaminen tutkimusaiheen parissa, ja jolloin tutkijan on mahdollista säilyttää avoimuus erilaisille tutkimuksen tekoa ohjaaville osaamis- ja tietämisnäkökulmille (Banks 2001, Tolonen – Palmu 2007, s. 104). Junien valokuvaaminen paikkani keskusteluita graffitimaalareiden kanssa ja valotti junanmaalausprosessia. Esimerkiksi Gillian Rosen (2007, s. 238) mukaan valokuvat voivat visuaalisena aineistomuotona tukea, todentaa ja laajentaa havainto- ja haastatteluai-neistoja tuntemusten ja refleksiivisyyden muodossa. Tutkimustapani lähestyi osittain visuaalista etnografiaa, jossa keskeinen osa aineistoa kerätään valokuvaamisen ja videoinnin avulla. Oleellista visuaalisessa etnografiassa on, että kuvat eivät sellaisenaan edusta objektiivista tietoa, vaan ne saavat merkityksensä tutkittavien tulkintojen myötä ja siten rakentavat tutkijan ja kentän vuorovaikutuksessa etnografista tietoa (Pink 2001, s. 35–36). Maalattun junan kohtaaminen oli jännittävä kokemus sekä minulle että graffitimaalareille ja sitä puitiin graffitimaalareiden kanssa kuvauksen jälkeen. Kanssatutkijat pystyivät valokuvien avulla kertomaan, miten maalaustilanne oli sujunut tai mikä oli mennyt pieleen ja miten junan kuvaaminen oli onnistunut. Samalla pystyin valokuvaamisen avulla antamaan jotakin graffitimaalareille takaisin. Esimerkiksi feministisessä ja refleksiivisessä etnografiassa tutkijan tulisi tietoisesti antaa kentälle jotakin takaisin, koska se saattaa tasapainottaa tutkijan ja tutkittavien välisiä valtarakenteita (Pink 2001, s. 23; Skeggs 2008; Lander 2006).

Kirjoitin muistiinpanoja kentästä noin reilun vuoden ajan, aloitin syystalvella 2011 ja kirjoitin vuoden 2012 loppuun. Kenttäjakson aikana tapasin kanssatutkijoiden lisäksi noin 20 graffitimaalaria. Vaikka heidän keskustelunsa eivät suoranaisesti kuuluneet aineistooni, heidän läsnäolonsa kentällä on väistämättä vaikuttanut alakulttuurin käsittämiseen ja ymmärtämiseen. Ikähaarukka oli laaja, tapaamani maalaajat olivat 18–35 -vuotiaita ja suurimmaksi osaksi miehiä. Kaikkiaan kenttämuistiinpanoja muodostui noin 50 sivua Word-tiedoston muodossa. Jakson aikana kirjoitin säännöllisesti muistiinpanoja, joissa pohdin tapahtumia, informanttien kanssa käytyjä keskusteluita ja graffitialakulttuurin tapoja suhteessa omiin näkemyksiini. Opiskelin informanttien kieltä, eräänlaista graffitislangia sekä heidän tapansa tarkastella seiniä ja ohi kulkevia metroja tai junia, jolloin katse oppi etsimään uusia tai ”buffattuja”, eli pois pestyjä graffiteja. Jakson aikana katselin lisäksi graffitielokuvia, luin paljon alan kirjallisuutta, graffitilehtiä ja internet-blogeja, joissa julkaistiin graffitikuvia.

Koska etnografisella tutkimustavalla voidaan kerätä aineistoa hyvin kirjavalla tavalla, on tärkeää löytää se tapa, joka sopii parhaiten tutkittavaan kulttuuriin. Tutkimustapaani kuului

olla ohjaamatta informanttien kanssa käytyjä keskusteluja, ja annoin heidän päättää keskusteluaiheista. En myöskään nauhoittanut keskusteluita, vaan sitaattit perustuvat muistiinpanoihin, jotka useimmiten kirjoitin kentän ulkopuolella. Tutkittavien anonymiteetin ja arkaluonteisen aineiston kannalta oli erittäin tärkeää, että pidin huolta tutkimuksen aineistosta, jotta se ei päätyisi ulkopuolisille tahoille tai väärin käsiin. Tämän vuoksi en pääsääntöisesti kirjoittanut muistiinpanoja kentällä ollessani, vaan enimmäkseen sen ulkopuolella, ollessani paikassa jossa pystyin turvaamaan aineiston. Kenttä oli hyvin liikkuva ja muistiinpanojen kirjoittaminen juosten kanssatutkijoiden perässä juna-aseilla ja radanvarsilla olisi sitä paitasi ollut hyvin hankalaa. Esimerkiksi *Ingrid Lander* (2006, s. 33) varoittaa muistiinpanojen kirjoittamisesta kentällä, koska se saattaa vaikeuttaa luottamuksen syntymistä tutkijan ja tutkittavan välillä tutkijan kiinnittäessä enemmän huomiota lehtiönsä kuin tutkittavaan.

Kun kyseessä on kriminologinen kenttätutkimus, on selvää, että tutkija kentällä tulee kosketukseen laittoman toiminnan kanssa. Tällöin tutkijan on joko hyväksyttävä se tai vaihdettava tutkimusaihetta tai -menetelmää. Vaitiovelvollisuus ja informanttien suojeleminen on lähtökohtaista kaikessa tieteellisessä tutkimuksessa, myös silloin kun tutkitaan rikollisuutta (*Kuula* 2006, s. 96–97). Kulttuurisen kriminologian piirissä puhutaankin ääriyöskentelystä (engl. *edgework*), kun tutkija osallistuu rikollisen kentän toimintaan (*Ferrell – Hamm* 1998). Ferrellin (1998, s. 30) mukaan etnografinen ääriyöskentely mahdollistaa kenttää koskevan kriminologisen ymmärryksen (vrt. *verstehen*), jossa tutkija asettaa itsensä kentän tasolle, kohdaten samoja riskejä kuin tutkittavansa jakamalla kokemukset yhdessä. Kuvien ottaminen juna-aseilla ei ollut täysin riskitöntä, ja joskus junien kuljettajat tai konduktöörit huusivat meille näyttäen nyrkkiä tai keskisormea. Graffitimaalareilla oli silloin kiire poistua ennen kuin virkavaltaa kutsuttaisiin paikalle. Junagraffitien kuvaamisen lisäksi näin graffitimaalareiden joskus ”tägävän”⁸ kadulla. Seurasin myös heitä hylättyihin taloihin ja rakennuksiin, jotka he olivat omaksuneet epävirallisiksi maalauspaikoiksi. Lisäksi kokeilin itsekin graffitien maalaamista luvallisiin katutaideseiniin.

Ääriyöskentelyllä on alakulttuuritutkimuksessa pitkät perinteet (esim. *Becker* 1963, *Polsky* 1967, *Whyte* 1943) ja Suomessakin on tehty siihen perustuvia tutkimuksia; *Jussi Perälä* (2011) vietti vuosia huumeluukuissa seuraten huumeiden käyttöä ja myyntiä, ja *Heli Vaaranen* (2004) istui kaaharipoikien kyydissä, kun ajettiin ylinopeutta jäisillä maanteilla.

Graffititieto – graffitialakulttuurinen pääoma

Graffitien maalaamisen motiiviksi on esitetty nuoren tarvetta näkyä ja kilpailua näkyvyydestä (*Høigård* 2007, s. 35; *Jacobson* 2003, s. 6; *Malinen* 2011, s. 173; *Macdonald* 2002, s. 68–71). Toisaalta muitakin motiiveja graffitien maalaamiseen on painotettu, kuten esteettistä kokemusta, onnistumisen tunnetta ja sosiaalisen merkityksen tärkeyttä (*Helin* 2014, s. 82; *Malinen* 2011, s. 168; *Isomursu – Jääskeläinen* 1998, s. 58). *Malinen* (2011, s. 175) toteaa, että syitä maalaamiseen lienee yhtä monta kuin tekijöitä. Kun keskustellaan graffiteista rikoksentorjunnan kontekstissa, ”feimin” (engl. fame) käsite nousee tärkeäksi. Fei-

8 Tägätä = tagin, eli oman signatuurin, katunimensä, kirjoittaminen spraymaalilla tai tussilla.

mi käsitteenä kuvaa tutkimuksessani alakulttuurista näkyvyyttä eli sitä, kuinka näkyvä kun graffitimaalaja on kadulla, internetissä tai alan lehdissä. Feimin määrittely kuitenkin vaihtelee eri tutkimuksissa; Helin (2014, s. 83) näkee sen maalattujen töiden määrän ja laadun vertaismäärittelyn tuloksena, johon liittyy olennaisesti myös alakulttuurinen kunnioitus, kun taas Malisen (2011, s. 66, 72) tutkimuksessa feimi maineikkautena erotetaan kunnioituksesta, niin kutsutusta respektistä. Pääsääntöisesti feimi ja kunnioitus kuvaavat kuitenkin graffititutkimuksissa graffitimaalarin alakulttuurista asemaa ja statusta, jotka tietyssä määrin kertovat jotakin siitä, minkälaista alakulttuurista pääomaa on yksilön hallussa.

Alakulttuurinen pääoma ja nollatoleranssi rikosensorjuntamenetelmänä linkittyvät toisiinsa tarkasteltaessa nollatoleranssiympäristön vaikutusta alakulttuurin pääoman rakenteisiin. Nollatoleranssin puolustajat vetoavat osittain feimiin, jonka mukaan näkyvä graffiti lisää uusien graffitien tekoa nuorten välisessä kilpailussa. Tällaiset pelkistetyt ajatusmallit, joissa nojaututaan tilannekohtaiseen rikosensorjuntamalliin ja luonnehditaan ihmisen käyttäytymistä rutiininomaiseksi, esittävät alakulttuurin monimutkaisuuden yksinkertaistettuna. Puhdistamalla graffitit pois luodaan uskoa siihen, että kulttuuri kuolisi, koska graffitilla ei kommunikoida näkyvästi ja ylläpidetä keskustelua jäsenten kesken (Smith 2001, s. 171).

Graffitialakulttuurin kommunikointi jäsentensä kesken on kuitenkin moniulotteisempaa, eikä pelkästään näkyvä graffiti kaupunkitilassa ylläpidä keskustelua, vaan myös graffitin näkyvyys rakentaa alakulttuurista tietoa ja ymmärrystä. Esimerkiksi tyhjät radanvarret kertoivat graffitimaalareille kaupungin strategiasta graffiteja vastaan. Alakulttuurinen pääoma voi nollatoleranssiympäristössä olla graffitimaalareiden tietämystä siitä, miten esimerkiksi maalata junia kovan kontrollin alaisena. Graffitialakulttuurin pääomaa rakentuu silloin monipuolisesta tietämyksestä, junaliikenteen ja -ratojen yksityiskohdista, jotka graffitimaalajat lukevat maalauksen mahdollisuuksina, eräänlaisena graffititietona. Graffititieto siitä, kuka oli maalannut ja missä, ei rakentunut tutkimuksessani pelkästään graffitin fyysisestä näkyvyydestä, vaan niistä nähdyistä kuvista sekä graffitimaalareiden välisistä keskusteluista ja huhuista. Nollatoleranssin myötä graffitialakulttuuri rakensi uutta alakulttuurista tietoa, jonka avulla graffitien maalaaminen sai uudenlaisia merkityksiä. Erittelen seuraavaksi etnografisten muistiinpanojen avulla alakulttuurisen pääoman rakentumista karnevalistisena kokemuksena vuorovaikutuksessa kontrollin kanssa.

Graffitin karnevalistisuus kontrollin vuorovaikutuksessa

Nuorempana graffitimaalareiden yhteisen riskinoton ja adrenaliinin virtaamisen kokemukset olivat tärkeitä, koska ne määrittivät aluksi eräänlaista alakulttuurista jäsenyyttä. Ferrell (1998) esittää alakulttuurisen jäsenyyden muodostuvan intensiivisistä yhteisöllisistä kokemuksista, joissa koettu riski ja siitä selviytyminen hahmottavat jäsenyyttä ja alakulttuuriin kuulumista. Tällaisia kokemuksia kerrottiin graffitimaalareiden kesken usein niin, että yhden kertomuksen jälkeen toinen graffitimaalari kertoi uuden tarinan, joka oli entistä räväkempi. Tällä tavoin kilvoiteltiin rajuimmasta kokemuksesta. Seuraavassa muistiinpanossa graffitimaalari kertoo, miten nuoruudessaan junavaunun ”tukottaminen”, täydessä liiken-

9 Tukottaa = kirjoitella tageja paljon ja intensiivisesti.

teessä täynnä matkustajia oli ollut hurja kokemus.

”Hypättiin frendin kaa A:sta kyytiin ja alettiin heti tukottaa mestat paskaks. Sit siin B:n kohal tuli joku muijakonnari, ei siit tarvinnu mitää välittää, vaik yritti sanoo jotain. Sit se meni sanoo sille äijäkonnarille ja ne alko hidastaa junaa. Se äijä alko huutaa meille ja sano et no nii ny teijät on kiinni otettu, mut me vaa huudettiin et saat vittu rassist¹⁰! Frendi heitti sitä lekal¹¹ päähän ja ku oltii C:n kohal, nii ne oli hidastanu sitä junaa nii paljo et jokasen oven kohal oli laituril stigu¹² venaamas meit, mut ne oli nii tyhmii ettei ne tajunnu et pystyttii avaa ovet hätä avauksel toiselt puolelt ja hypättii vaa ulos ja päästii hanee. Meitsi heitti viel jotain spaguu¹³ siihe kylkeen. Kylhä siit sit kuulustelut tuli myöhemmin ja Karppinen¹⁴ oli ihan hies siit. Tais tulla tuomiokin sit myöhemmin, joku vahingonteko ja pahoinpitely.”

Tarinassa tulee esille graffitimaalareiden junakaluston tekniikkaa koskeva tieto. He tiesivät, että hätäavauksen avulla voi hypätä alas raiteille ja päihittää vartijat sekä junan konduktöörit. Sukupuolierottelu on tarinassa myös läsnä. Naispuolisesta konduktööristä ei ”*tarvinnu mitää välittää, vaik yritti sanoo jotain*” ja varsinainen taistelu käytiin ”*äijäkonnarin*” ja vartijoiden kanssa. Esimerkiksi Macdonald (2002, s. 104–105) ja Høigård (2007, s. 362) liittävät kilpailevan riskin ottamisen alakulttuuriseen kunnioituksen tavoitteluun, jolla konstruoidaan maskuliinisuutta. Tämänkaltaisia tarinoita kerrottiin usein nauraen ja huvittuneena sekä jopa omasta osaamisesta ylpeillen, kun samalla nuoruus hahmotettiin hullutteluna. Mike Presdee (2000, s. 38) kuvaa alakulttuureja luovina ratkaisuinä yliorganisoidulle yhteiskunnalle. Tämän mukaisesti alakulttuurit voivat merkitä hetkellisiä mahdollisuuksia olla yhteiskunnan ulkopuolella, kun liiallinen sääntely kutsuu ihmisiä etsimään radikaaleja hauskanpidon muotoja. Presdee (2000, s. 50) kutsuu tätä rikosten karnevalisoinniksi, joka ilmenee rituaalin kaltaisena ja näyttävänä normin rikkomisena, jossa juhlistetaan väärin tekemistä.

Tutkimuksessani graffitimaalareiden karnevalistiset äärikokemukset ja ”turhan” riskin ottaminen vähenivät kuitenkin alakulttuurisen jäsenyyden vakiintuessa. Graffitimaalarit pitivät kiinnijäämisen riskiä vakavana ja vältettävänä asiana, usein kantapään kautta opittujen tapahtumien vuoksi. Kiinnijäämistä pidettiin nuoruuden tyhmyytenä, jolloin ei ollut vielä saavutettu riittävästi alakulttuurista tietoa ja ymmärrystä näiden tilanteiden välttymiseltä. Eräs graffitimaalari kommentoi nuorempia maalareita näin: ”*Noi duunaa jonkun verran seinii ja bommaa¹⁵ ihan hyvin, mut jää kans usein kiinni. Kai se pitää kantapään kautta oppii.*” Toisaalta ensimmäistä kiinnijäämistä pidettiin joskus ”putkakoulutuksena”, jolloin testattiin graffitimaalarin uskollisuutta alakulttuuria kohtaan. Vakiintuneen maalarin uskotavuus näyttäytyi vankempänä, jos hän jatkoi kiinnijäämisestä huolimatta ja jatkossa pystyi

10 Rassi = puukko tai teräväpäinen työkalu.

11 Leka = spraymaalipurkki.

12 Stigu = vartija.

13 Spagu = ”spagetti”, tussilla tai spraymaalilla tehty aaltomainen viiva.

14 Nimi vaihdettu; VR:n aikaisempi turvallisuuspäällikkö, joka oli hyvin tunnettu graffitimaalajien keskuudessa.

15 Bommata = tögätä, kirjoitella tagiaan.

maalaamaan jäämättä kiinni. Seuraavassa kahdessa muistiinpanossa graffitimaalarit tekevät eroa nuoruuden humalatilassa otettuun riskiin ja vanhemmaksi tullessa harkinnanvaraisempaan toimintaan.

”Pienenä teki ihan mitä sattui ihan minne vaa. Sillo oli leikat messis aina, vaik ei oltu ees mitää suunniteltu. Nykyä leikat on mukana vaa jos on oikeesti menos duunaan jotain(...) Emmä halua turhaa saada ongelmii. Jos on kännis, nii sitä innostuu nii helposti, vittu ei todellakaa kandeä pitää mitää lekoi messis sillo. Parempi vaa jättää ne suosiol himaa, emmä ny linnaa halua!”

”Kylhä sen jo täs vaihees on tajunnu et tota menoo hommais ittensä linnaan. Fäpsi-en¹⁶ on nii helppo seuraa sua jos ne tietää et sä bommaat koko ajan, aina ku oot ulkona, nii ei niiden tarvi ku tsiigaa sua perjantai-illan ku sä kännis meet ja tulla vakio baarii oottaa jengii tai sit venaa sua himan ees. Mut jos sä kyhää stogee¹⁷ kerran viikos, nii ei ne voi sua sen takii 24 h seurata.”

Alkoholi voi ylläpitää ajoittain nuorempien graffitimaalareiden yhteenkuuluvuutta sekä toimia symbolisena keinona osoittaa maskuliinisuutta, jossa bommailu vahvistaa ryhmäjäsenyyttä toimien rajankäyntinä alakulttuurin ulkopuolisiin samantyyppisesti kuin *Antti Maunun* (2011, s. 18) tulkinnat ammattiin opiskelevien poikien katutappeluista. Alakulttuurisen jäsenyyden vahvistuessa kännissä bommaaminen kaupungilla ei kuitenkaan enää tuonut tyydytystä, ja graffitimaalarit siirtyivät suunnitelmallisempaan maalaamiseen, ja monien tagien sijasta tehtiin yhtenäisempi teos, ”piissi”¹⁸ radanvarrelle tai junan kylkeen. Malisen (2011, s. 170–171) tutkimuksessa alkuvaiheen bommaamista käsitellään graffitimaalareiden laittomana vaiheena, jonka jälkeen graffitin maalauksessa siirrytään esteettisten kokemusten painottamiseen, jolloin se orientoituu vähemmän laittomaksi. Omassa tutkimuksessani alkuvaiheen bommaamisesta siirtyminen piissien tekoon ei orientoitunut vähemmän laittomaksi, mutta niiden tekemiseen liittyvä näkyvyys ja riskinotto oli erilaista.

Graffitimaalareiden tarinat yhteenotoista vartiointiyhtyritysten, poliisien ja muiden viranomaisien kanssa kuvasivat alakulttuurin ja valta-yhteiskunnan välisiä jännitteitä. Graffitimaalareiden keskuudessa osoitettiin suurta vihaa varsinkin vartiointiyhtyritystä kohtaan, joka oli nollatoleranssiprojektin aikana antanut useita todistajalausuntoja isoissa oikeudenkäynneissä graffitimaalajia vastaan. Graffitimaalarit osasivat nimetä ja tunnistaa monia vartijoita ja poliiseja, ja niin myös vartijat ja poliisit puolestaan heitä. Graffitimaalauksiin lisättiin kommentteja vartiointiyhtyrityksen työntekijöistä ja graffitipoliiseista. Joskus kerrottiin tapauksista, joissa siviilipukeiset vartijat olivat seuranneet heitä, joskus jopa kotiovelle saakka. Tällainen henkilökohtainen suhde vartijoiden ja maalajien välillä, jossa kadulla kohdatessaan tervehdittiin toinen toistaan sukunimellä tai tagin perusteella, tuotti tietynlaista mainetta niin graffitimaalarille kuin vastustajapuolelle. Macdonald (2002, s. 124–125) tuo tutkimuksessaan esille,

16 Fäpsit = nimitys entiselle vartiointiyhtyritykselle, FPS, joka on nykyään osa Turvatiimi Oyj:ta.

17 Stoge = juna.

18 Piissi = (engl. piece) kookas graffitimaalaus, jossa on käytetty useita värejä, kirjainten täyttöä ja niiden rajaamista.

kuinka poliisityö toimii eräänlaisena alakulttuurisen kunnioituksen ja feimin resurssina silloin, kun graffitimaalaarista tulee kaupungin etsityin. *James Messerschmidt*in (1993, s. 175) viitaten Macdonald korostaa poliisityön merkitystä myös maskuliinisuuden konstruktiolle, jossa graffitimaalareiden ja poliisin välillä käydään eräänlaista miehisyyden taistelua kadun valasta. Maskuliinisuuden konstruktio vaikutti vahvistuvan kontrollin kiristyessä graffitimaalareiden ympärille, mutta kunnioitus riippui siitä, pystyttiinkö kiinnijäämistä välttämään. Macdonald (2002, s. 191) toteaa, että piittaamattomuuden seurauksena alakulttuuri ei välttämättä toimi enää hetkellisenä mahdollisuutena olla yhteiskunnan ulkopuolella, jos siitä joutuu vankilaan. Kiinnijääminen ei ollut tutkimukseni graffitimaalareille yhdenmukaista, koska se kosketti heidän kunnioitusta itsehallinnan ja koskemattomuuden yhteydessä.

Junat alakulttuurisen tiedon rakentajina

Junien ja metrojen maalaaminen on ollut kautta aikain graffitialakulttuurin arvostetuimpia maalauskohteita (esim. *Isomursu – Jääskeläinen* 1998, s. 54; *Macdonald* 2002, s. 83; *Malinen* 2011, s. 196) ja graffitikulttuurin synty on osittain nähty perustuvan New Yorkissa 1970-luvulla kehittyneisiin metrograffiteihin (*Helin* 2014, s. 16; *Naar* 2007). Pääkaupunkiseudun vanhanaikaiset paikallisjunat, ”paikkarit” sekä Helsingin metro, eli ”mötö”, olivat tutkimuksessani graffitimaalareiden mielestä parhaimpia maalauskohteita. Junan, eli ”stogen” ulkoinen kylki, niin kutsuttu ”paneli”, joka kuvaa ikkunoiden alapuolella olevaa aluetta, oli monen graffitimaalarin mielestä täydellinen pinta piissille. Helsingin metroa arvostettiin niin paljon, että erään graffitimaalarin mielestä ”*yks paneli Suomen mötös on parempi kuin kymmenen muuta mötöpanelia yhteensä*”. Omissa muistiinpanoissani ei juuri muutoin nouse esille, miksi junat olivat arvostetuimpia kohteita graffitimaalareille, ainakaan suurin sitaatein. Osittain tämä voi johtua siitä, että junien maalaaminen oli informanteille niin oleellista, että sitä ei erikseen tarvinnut keskusteluissa tuoda esille. Suomessa tunnetuimpiin graffitimaalareihin kuuluva *Trama* kertoo kuitenkin junien maalaamisesta Helsinki Graffitissa (*Isomursu – Jääskeläinen* 1998, s. 97) näin:

”Junaa voi aina maalaa pelkästään maalaamisen ilosta, se on kuitenkin sen verran parempi fiilis maalata junaa. Vaikka se ei rullais ku tunnin, jos sä saat siitä valokuvan, se riittää. Ja jos ei rullaa, ei voi mitään. Kyl se risoo VR:ää silti yhtä paljon. Pääasia on et niit saa tehty.”

Sitaatti kuvaa, kuinka graffitimaalareille junien maalaaminen ei perustu pelkän feimin tavoitteluun, vaan yhtä tärkeäksi nousee maalaamisen tekeminen ja kokemus. Ajoittain on annettu ymmärtää, että New Yorkissa metrograffitit ovat hävinneet tehokkaan puhdistustoiminnan myötä (*Gastman – Neelon* 2011, s. 29; *Snyder* 2006, s. 93; *Iveson* 2010, s. 129). Nollatoleranssi-ideologian mukaan graffiteja ei ole enää syytä tehdä metroihin, koska kukaan ei niitä näe eikä siitä silloin saa feimiä. Kuitenkin tutkimuksessani graffitimaalareille junamaalausten näkyminen ei välttämättä ollut maalaamisen tarkoitus ja joskus oli jopa parempi, että muut graffitimaalajaajat eivät nähneet niitä. VR on noudattanut nollatoleranssia

maalattujen junien suhteen jo pitkään ja ne poistetaan liikenteestä mahdollisimman pian. Tämä rajoittaa alakulttuurisen tiedon kulkemista ja hyödyttää niitä graffitimaalareita, jotka ovat vakiintuneita junanmaalareita ja haluavat pitää junien maalaamisen taidot salassa. Koska graffitimaalarit kuitenkin tarkkailivat jatkuvasti ympäristöään, joukkoliikennettä ja radanvarren seiniä, he saattoivat joskus bongata toisten maalareiden junamaalauksia. Bongattuaan maalatun junan oli tärkeää selvittää, missä ja miten juna oli maalattu.

”Terve’ Hessu¹⁹ sanoo ja ravistaa vahvasti kättäni. Hän kääntyy Tomia kohti ja alkaa heti selittää paneleista jotka hän oli juuri nähnyt ennen kuin tapasi meidät. ’Toss steisil näin ainaki kolmet [panelit], kahet värit ja yhet kromit²⁰.’. Hessu puhuu nopeasti ja kiihtyneesti. ’No? Mennäänks tsiigaa?’ Tomi sanoo, vähän niin kuin se olisi itsestäänselvyys. Pojat päättävät että kävellään rataa pitkin kohti Linnunlaulua katsomaan jos ’ne’ rullaisi uudestaan ohi. Tomi kysyy Hessulta jos hän tiesi millä linjalla panelit oli rullannu²¹. ’Emmä ku menin sporat manskul ja näin ne nii kaukaa etten oikee nähny ees piisseikää kunnot’. Kysyn jos se on tärkeää tietää millä linjalla ne rullaa. ’On, koska sit voi päätel et miss ne on tehty.’. ’Onko se hyvä tietää?’. ’On. Pitää tietää miss jengi on käyny. Ja ketä.’”

Graffitimaalareilla oli hyvinkin tarkkaa tietoa junien aikatauluista ja niiden avulla osattiin seurata junien liikkeitä. Maalatun junan bongatessaan oli mahdollista selvittää, missä se oli maalattu kellonajasta ja linjasta riippuen. Oli tärkeää selvittää, missä juna oli maalattu, koska se antoi maalajille tietoa siitä, kuinka usein tiettyssä paikassa käytiin maalaamassa. Tämä oli turvallisuuden kannalta tärkeää, sillä ei olisi viisasta maalata samaa paikkaa heti seuraavana yönä uudestaan. Haluttiin välttää ”mestojen raiskaantumista”, eli sitä että jotakin junan seisontapaikkaa maalattaisiin liikaa ja paikan vartiointi siksi lisääntyisi. Graffitimaalareiden bongatessa tuntemattomia paneleita saatettiin radanvarrella viettää useampi tunti, jotta maalaukset mahdollisesti nähtäisiin uudestaan ja pystyttäisiin tarkemmin selvittämään junan kulkua ja sitä, ketkä saattoivat olla teoksien takana.

Junien kulkureittien jatkuva tarkkailu oli kehittänyt graffitimaalareille aivan omanlaisensa alakulttuurisen tiedon. Mitä enemmän oli tietoa ”systeemin” toimivuudesta, sitä enemmän mahdollisuuksia junan maalaamiselle löytyi. Graffitimaalari, joka itse otti selvää tai keksi uuden tavan maalata junaa, osoitti alakulttuurista omistautumista. Tällainen graffititieto ei kehittynyt hetkessä, vaan oli monen vuoden harjoituksen tulos. Tieto hyvästä junanmaalauspaikasta pidettiin pienen piirin sisällä, eikä sitä haluttu levittää kaikille. Seuraavassa muistiinpanossa graffitimaalari kertoo, kuinka eräänlainen hiljainen tieto junasysteemistä koettiin yhdessä toisen graffitimaalarin kanssa junia seuraamalla.

”Aluks mä olin vähä epäileväinen tätä tyyppiä kohtaan ku se jauho aika paljon kaikkee

19 Muistiinpanoissa esiintyvillä henkilöillä on todellisuudessa jokin muu nimi.

20 *Kahet värit ja yhet kromit* = kaksi graffitimaalauksia, jotka oli täytetty monivärisillä spraymaalilla ja yksi graffitimaalaus, joka oli täytetty pelkästään hopeanvärisellä spraymaalilla, kromilla.

21 Rullata = olla liikenteessä.

ettei tiennyt et voiks siihe luottaa. Mut sit hogas jossain vaihees et se tajuu vitusti asioita, sillee et yks kerta ku oltii posse²² hengaa toss radan varres muuten vaa nii siit meni tyhjä stoge ohi ja mä huomasin ku tää jäbä alko sillee heti kelaa et mist se tuli. Aluks mä olin sille et 'mitä' ku se jäi jumittaa, mut sit mä tajusin heti itekki ja olin vaa sillee 'aa, joo joo'. Se ei sanonu mitää mut tajus[in] kuitenkin et mitä se kelas."

Tilanteessa oivallettiin eräänlaista yhteisymmärrystä alakulttuurisesta tiedosta, jota ei ollut tarvetta lausua ääneen. Graffitimaalari arvosti toisen älykkyyttä bongata juna, jota oltiin kuljettamassa "tyhjänä", eli ilman matkustajia. Junaa oltiin joko siirtämässä pois matkustajaliikenteestä tai sitä oltiin viemässä liikenteeseen jonnekin muualle. Graffitimaalareille kaikki tällainen poikkeava liikenne tuotti lisää ymmärrystä junien liikkumisesta. Rutiinista poikkeavan junaliikenteen saattoi kuitenkin vain huomata harjaantunut silmäpari.

Kontrolloitu feimi kuvien muodossa

Graffitikuvat olivat graffitimaalareiden aarteita. Maalattujen junien kuvaaminen oli erityisen tärkeää, koska kuva toimi todisteena siitä, että junagraffiti oli joskus ollut olemassa. Koska junat poistettiin liikenteestä mahdollisimman pian, niiden kuvaaminen oli rajallista ja sen vuoksi graffitimaalarit opiskelivat junareittien aikatauluja. Junan kuvauspaikkaa suunniteltiin tarkasti, jotta kuvan ottaminen onnistuisi mahdollisimman hyvin. Tämän vuoksi pohdittiin esimerkiksi, mistä suunnasta aurinko paistaisi tai millainen valaistus juna-asemalla olisi. Junien valokuvaaminen oli pitkäjänteistä työtä, jossa maalattua junaa odotettiin hartaasti kelloja vilkuillen, jännityksestä tai toisinaan kylmyydestä täristen. Koskaan ei voinut olla täysin varma, tulisiko maalattu juna asemalle ja joskus kävikin niin, että maalattua junaa ei koskaan löytynyt. Maalarit lähtivät silloin pettyneinä kotiin, vaikka maalaustilanteessa olisikin otettu "yökuva" graffitista. Toisinaan kuvaaminen ei aina ollut kaikille tärkeää tai mieluisaa. Joskus liian väsyneet graffitimaalarit luistivat kuvaustyöstä ja silloin saatoinkin kuulla jäljelle jääneeltä maalarilta: *"Mua vituttaa ku luotetaa vaa siihen et joku muu saa kuvattuu!"* Kuvaaminen oli rankkaa, sillä usein graffitimaalarit valvoivat koko yön maalatessaan ensin junan ja sitten odottaessaan aamulla junaa asemalla. Lisäjännityksen toivat aseman valvontakamerat, joita väisteltiin huppujen alla.

Alakulttuuri reagoi puhdistusongelmaan graffitimedian avulla. *Gregory Snyderin* (2006, s. 94) mukaan graffitilehdet kehittyivät Philadelphiassa vastalauseena antigraffitiliikkeelle. Lehtien tekeminen on merkinnyt tilaa, jossa kehitetään yhteisöllisyyttä, tietoutta ja ryhmäsolidaarisuutta graffitimaalareiden kesken, jotka ovat muuten joutuneet valta-yhteiskunnassa moralisoinnin kohteeksi. Suomalaisia graffitilehtiä on ilmestynyt parhaimmillaan muutama vuodessa. Vuosien 2006–2013 aikana ovat ilmestyneet muun muassa *Boiling Point* vol. 1-3, *Sisu Magazine* vol. 1-3, *Anti Social Magazine* vol. 1-2, *Drips* ja *Problems of Society* vol. 1-4. Lehtien nimet, "yhteiskunnan ongelmat", "kiehumispiste" ja "antisosiaalinen", kertovat jotakin graffitin yhteiskunnallisesta asemasta ja kyvystä osoittaa sille itseironiaa.

22 Posse = porukka.

Lehdet ovat ennen kaikkea tila, jossa karnevalisoida graffitia ja jossa juhlistaa väärin tekemistä.

Graffitilehdissä on vaikeampaa saada oma kuva julkaistua, koska lehden toimittaja päättää viime kädessä kuvien julkaisemisesta. Painettuja graffitilehtiä arvostettiin enemmän kuin internet-sivustoja, joita jokaisella oli mahdollisuus ylläpitää. Kuvien julkaisemiseen liittyi paljon sääntöjä, joita graffitimaalarit pohtivat, ennen kuin lähettivät kuvan toimitukseen. Huolellisesti tehty ja monimutkaiset junagraffitit kielivät hyvästä maalauspaikasta: *"Toi on nii vitun kova pansku²³ et ei ehkä kandee laittaa lehteen!"* Maalauspaikkojen katoaminen junaliikenteen muuttuessa helpotti taas kuvan julkaisemista, koska sen alakulttuurista tietoa ei enää voitu käyttää. Graffitilehtiä selattiin yhdessä ja kuvia katsomalla oli mahdollista kehittää keskustelemalla alakulttuurista tietoa. Kuvasta pyrittiin myös analysoimaan sen kuvauspaikka. Aseman ja junamallin perusteella saatettiin arvailla, millä linjalla juna oli kulkenut ja missä juna oli maalattu. Kuvan valituksen ja matkustajien vaatetuksen perusteella pystyttiin arvioimaan, mihin vuodenaikaan tai vuorokaudenaikaan kuva oli otettu.

Graffitilehdet kertovat maalareille paljon siitä, mitä alakulttuurissa tapahtuu, ketkä maalaavat missä ja kuinka usein sitä tehdään. Graffitilehdet voidaan nähdä uusina graffitimaalareiden kohteina, joiden kautta saavutetaan feimiä ja arvostusta (Snyder 2009, s. 148). Graffitimaalarin ei enää tarvitse miettiä fyysisen graffitin potentiaalista yleisöä, kun lehteen lähetetty kuva tavoittaa tuhansia katsojia. Ferrell ja Robert Wiede (2010, s. 59) kutsuvat graffitimediaa *juokseviksi kohteiksi* (vrt. engl. *liquid spots*), jolla viitataan siihen, että graffitin tilallisuus hämärtyy graffitimedian avulla ja irrottautuu siitä luokittelusta, jossa perinteisesti arvioidaan kunnioitettuja kohteita alakulttuurissa. Esimerkiksi kuva maalatusta junasta voi todellisuudessa olla "roskajuna", eli käytöstä poistettu ja romutukseen menevä juna. Roskajunia ei alakulttuurissa arvostettu yhtä paljon kuin liikenteessä olevia junia, sillä niiden maalaaminen oli riskittömämpää junien menetettyä käyttöarvonsa. Graffitimaalareiden mielestä oli jopa kyseenalaista lähettää kuva roskajunasta graffitilehteen: *"No kuka vittu nyt näitä roskia laittaa lehtiin!?"*

Feimin tavoitteluun liittyy moninaisia sääntöjä, jotka kontrolloivat sen arvostusta. Helpon feimin tavoittelu graffitimediassa saatettiin tulkita itsensä myymisenä ja jossain määrin pinnallisena tai epäkunnioitettavana. Macdonaldin (2002, s. 173) tutkimuksessa pohditaan graffitialakulttuurissa käytettyä *sell outs* -käsitettä. Graffitimaalarit viittasivat sillä alakulttuurisessa keskustelussa maalareihin, jotka ovat myyneet itsensä institutionaaliselle graffitikulttuurille julkisuuskuvan toivossa. Samoin *cheap fame* -käsite kuvaa Ferrellin ja Wieden (2010, s. 59) artikkelissa graffitimaalareita, jotka pyrkivät esille mahdollisimman paljon lähettämällä kuviaan julkaisufoorumeihin. Alakulttuurinen kunnioitus on siten vahvemman sääntelyn kohteena kuin feimi irrallisenaan tai pelkän näkyvyyden muotona. "Aitona" pysyminen vaati kunnianhimoa, jossa graffiteja ei vain maalattu feimin toivossa, vaan oikean intohimon puolesta. Tällöin kuvien julkaiseminen ja kunnioituksen saavuttaminen vaati tasapainottelua ja tietoa siitä, milloin kuvien julkaiseminen oli alakulttuurisen arvostuksen mukaista.

23 Pansku = paneli, junamaalaus.

Johtopäätökset

Artikkelissani olen aikaisemman graffititutkimuksen ja kulttuurisen kriminologian valossa pyrkinyt analysoimaan, miten graffitialakulttuurinen pääoma rakentuu alakulttuurisen tiedon kautta nollatoleranssiympäristössä. Tutkimukseni etnografinen aineisto perustuu muisiinpanoihin, jotka on kirjoitettu pääkaupunkiseudulla vuosina 2011 ja 2012, lähinnä junia maalaavien graffitimaalareiden parissa. Kentällä toimiminen sekä tutkijana, valokuvaajana että ystävänä on olennaisesti vaikuttanut käsitykseeni kulttuurista ja sen ymmärtämiseen tiedon tuottamisessa. Etnografiaa tehdessä tutkija harvemmin väittää pyrkivänsä luomaan objektiivista tietoa tai löytämään absoluuttista totuutta, vaan tavoitteena on pikemminkin esittää tutkijan kokemuksia todellisuudesta lojaalina kontekstille, jonka avulla tietoa on saavutettu (Malinen 2011, s. 44; Pink 2001, s. 18–19). Etnografia on keino, jolla voidaan tuoda marginaalissa elävien äänet esille. Tutkimuksellani olen halunnut tuoda esille palan siitä todellisuudesta, jota luvaton graffitia harrastavat kokevat ja kertoa nollatoleranssin aikana aloitaneiden graffitimaalareiden tarinaa.

Graffitikulttuurin ja graffitialakulttuurin välistä keskustelua käydään lähinnä graffitin luvallisen ja luvattoman muodon eroista. Nykyinen pääkaupunkiseudun linja hyväksyä luvallinen graffiti osaksi kaupunkikulttuuria on vienyt sitä kohti keskiluokkaistumista, jossa lähinnä aikuiset miehet harrastelevat graffitien maalaamista Suvilahden luvallisilla katutaideseinillä (Helin 2014). Graffitit voidaan nykyään liittää Helsingissä gentrifikaatioon, kun se määritellään Kalasataman asuinalueen rakentamisessa ensiasukkaiden viihtyisyyden kehittäjänä (Helin 2014, s. 63). Graffitit voivat nykyään palvella kaupallisia intressejä ja epäjärjestyksen tai rikollisuuden sijaan merkitä trendikkyyttä ja uskaliaisuutta alueilla, jonne nuoret, muotitietoiset ja keskiluokkaiset haluavat muuttaa (Helin 2014, s. 20; Brisman 2012; Snyder 2009, s. 53). Alakulttuurisen pääoman muuntaminen legitiimiksi vaatii kuitenkin taloudellista pääomaa, sillä luvallisten seinien massiiviset graffitimaalaukset vaativat paitsi aikaa myös huomattavan määrän spraymaaleja. Yksinkertaisemman maalauksen tekeminen vaatii vähemmän maaleja, mutta sen arvostusta voidaan lisätä valitsemalla teokselle alakulttuurisesti kunnioitettavampi kohde, kuten junan kylki. Luvattomuus nousee myös keinoksi suojautua kaupallisuutta vastaan, kun taas keskiluokkainen graffitikulttuuri osoittautuu vaihtoehdoksi niille graffitimaalareille, joilla on taloudellisia resursseja kehittää legitiimiä pääomaa.

Luvatonta graffitia ja nollatoleranssirikoksentorjuntamenetelmää tutkittaessa nousevat maalaamisen motiivit keskeisiksi. Halutaan tietää, miksi nuori tai aikuinen mies maalaa junia, vaikka se on laitonta. Graffititutkimuksissa alakulttuurinen kunnioitus on toisinaan nostettu näkyvyyden, feimin, rinnalle maalaamisen motiiviksi. Kunnioitus maskuliinisena konstruktiona kytkeytyi tutkimuksessani graffitimaalarin alakulttuuriseen tietoon ja taitoon maalata laittomasti kiinnijäämistä välttäten. Graffitien kriminalisoinnin myötä ja kontrollin kiristyksessä maalaaminen rakentui intensiiviseksi kilpailuksi, jossa oli mahdollista todistaa omaa osaamista ja rakentaa alakulttuurista statusta. Kontrollin vuorovaikutuksessa graffitien karnevalisointi rakentui nuoremmille graffitimaalareille tempaavana bommaamisena, kun taas vakiintuneiden maalarien kohdalla graffitien karnevalistisuutta juhlistettiin graffitilehdissä kuvien muodossa.

Junaliikenne toimi vuorovaikutuksessa graffitimaalareiden kanssa alakulttuurisen tiedon tuottajana. Alakulttuurisen tiedon tuottaminen perustui VR:n nollatoleranssin tuomiin edellytyksiin. Graffitimaalareiden oli tiedettävä tarkasti, milloin, missä ja miten jokin yksittäinen juna seisoo, jotta sen voisi mahdollisemman turvallisesti maalata ja jotta sen kuvaaminen liikenteessä olisi mahdollista. Graffitimaalareiden piirissä kontrolloitiin alakulttuurista tietämystä ja taitoa junien maalaamisesta. Tässä ilmenee kontrolloidun alakulttuurisen tiedon merkityksellisyys, joka on noussut tutkimuksessani keskeiseksi alakulttuurisen pääoman tuottajaksi. Kontrolloitu graffititieto siitä, miten junia maalataan ja miten junaliikenne toimii, vähensi maalattujen junien määrää, mikä puolestaan hyödytti niitä graffitimaalareita, jotka pyrkivät kontrolloimaan junien maalaustilanteita.

Nollatoleranssissa graffitialakulttuurinen pääoma rakentuu tiedon kautta luovina ratkaisuina, joissa alakulttuuri löytää uusia keinoja tuottaa näkyvyyttä ja tietoa kuvien avulla. Samalla alakulttuurisesta näkyvyydestä tulee valinnanvaraista antaen graffitimaalareille päätösvaltaa oman feimin rakentamisessa. Graffiteja voi maalata ilman, että kukaan niitä koskaan näkee, eikä näkyvyys tai feimi ole välttämättä graffitialakulttuurin ydin. Tasapainottele näkymättömyyden ja näkyvyyden välillä on pääkaupunkiseudun luvattomia graffiteja maalaaville osa alakulttuurista sääntelyä ja graffitikulttuurista erottautumista. Graffitien markkinointi lehdissä voidaan kuitenkin tulkita kaupallisena tekona ja siten graffitimaalareiden on pyrittävä kohtuulliseen näkyvyyteen. On myös syytä pohtia sitä, miten graffitilehtien myynti tuottaa taloudellista pääomaa, vaikka lehtien kuvat junamaalauksista koostuvat laittomasta alakulttuurisesta pääomasta.

Helsinki Graffiti -teoksessa (*Isomursu – Jääskeläinen* 1998, s. 41) pohditaan alakulttuurin kaupallistumisen merkitystä 1990-luvulle tultaessa, jolloin graffiti koki ikään kuin inflaation juuri ennen nollatoleranssiprojektin alkua. Ehkä nollatoleranssin tuloa ei vastustettu graffitialakulttuurin piirissä, sillä sen markkinointi nähtiin ennemmin alakulttuurin kuihtumisena kuin sen edistäjänä. Stop töhryille -projektin tulo merkitsi vain graffitikulttuurin kriminalisointia, kun kovempi kontrolli taas vahvisti graffitialakulttuurin rakenteita ja alakulttuurisen pääoman rakentamista. Jos graffitien maalaamisen motiiveja pyritään analysoimaan nollatoleranssikontekstissa, feimin käsite näkyvyyden muotona on riittämätön. Graffitialakulttuurin pääoma koostuu pikemminkin tiedosta siitä, miten graffiteja maalataan kovan kontrollin alaisena, vahvistaen niiden graffitimaalareiden asemaa, jotka jäävät alakulttuuriselle kentälle kontrollin tiukentuessa.

Abstract in English

GRAFFITI KNOWLEDGE – AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY ON THE SUBCULTURE OF GRAFFITI WRITERS

The article is studying graffiti writing on trains in the capital area of Finland. The concept of subcultural capital in the context of a zero-tolerance environment is being examined through a cultural criminological perspective. Through ethnographic edgework, the author is exploring graffiti writers' world and the meanings of zero-tolerance. The core of graffiti writers' subcultural capital, fame, is seen in a very different meaning than what is pursued from the defenders of zero-tolerance politics. The visible form of graffiti becomes controlled not only through the politics of zero-tolerance, but also by the graffiti subculture itself.

Keywords: graffiti (sub)culture, zero-tolerance, subcultural capital, cultural criminology, ethnography

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GRAFFITI KNOWLEDGE—AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY ON THE SUBCULTURE OF GRAFFITI WRITERS

Abstract: From a cultural criminological perspective, current graffiti research explores the interplay between a subculture and society in general. Guided by this framework, this article reflects on how subcultural capital in graffiti writing is constructed through a subcultural knowledge process in a zero tolerance milieu. The ethnographic research material consists of notes taken in 2011 and 2012 from the field of graffiti writers who were mainly interested in painting trains. Access to the field has taken place through ethnographic edgework and by photographing train graffiti at stations and along railways together with the graffiti writers. Fame as a form of subcultural visibility becomes a significant matter when observing the interplay between graffiti practices and zero tolerance. Encountering and photographing graffiti-painted trains created specific subcultural knowledge of traffic routes, which informed graffiti writers about the possibilities for painting the train carriages. Moreover, negotiations concerning the publicity of the photographs taken of graffiti pieces shaped fame in controlled ways. The study demonstrates that in an interplay with control, graffiti writers find creative solutions to fame, not always approaching fame in ways what has been suggested from a zero tolerance perspective.

Keywords: graffiti (sub)culture, zero tolerance, subcultural capital, cultural criminology, ethnography

Introduction

The graffiti subculture in Helsinki appeared in the mid-1980s. However, in 1998–2008, graffiti was fought with an antigraffiti project called “Stop töhryille” (“Stop graffiti vandalism”), which was established by Helsinki’s Department for Public Works.¹ The public pressure against the project increased in the final stages of the project when city councilors were denied access to attend the project’s tenth anniversary seminar at Finlandia Hall. At the same time, near the modern art museum Kiasma, the counter-event “Töhryfest” (“Vandal-fest”) escalated in clashes between police and protesters, and 27 individuals were arrested. Mass media criticized the project for its zero tolerance policy, and Hannu Takala, a member of the Crime Prevention Council, called for an impartial investigation of the social effects of the project (HS 17.09.2008).

In the final years of the project, I became friends with a group of male graffiti writers in Helsinki. They were made up of a loose group of graffiti writers, and although they did not all belong to the same “*graffiti crew*,”² they shared a similar set of values and practices when engaging in graffiti writing. These graffiti writers were “spotting”³ their graffiti paintings along the rails and metro tracks on train carriages and walls. For these young men, experiences of police interrogations, pretrial detentions, and convictions for serious damage were mundane. The group is part of the graffiti subculture that has a stylistic tradition dating back to the graffiti writing that first started in the late 1960s in New York (e.g., Helin 2014, 13, 24–26). In my research, I refer to the concept of subculture from a theoretical perspective, allowing for a critical analysis for examining youth and deviancy and taking the social, historical, and political context into account (Blackman 2014, 508). Subcultures have been theorized as youths’ and marginal groups’ resistance against power structures while reflecting creative reactions toward social inequality (Blackman 2014). The graffiti writers I met started painting graffiti during the period of zero tolerance when graffiti in Helsinki was completely

¹ In Finnish “*Helsingin kaupungin rakennusvirasto*” (HKR). Since 2017, this department has been part of the Urban Environment Division.

² Graffiti crew = A group of graffiti writers who write a collective tag name together, often known by initials written along with their personal tag name.

³ Spotting = The practice of observing graffiti in the urban realm.

forbidden. Hence, the subculture is examined as a protest against society's over-regulations (Presdee 2000, 9).

The concepts of the *graffiti culture* (Helin 2014; Malinen 2013, 69) and *graffiti subculture* (Ferrell 1996; Macdonald 2002) have been used in graffiti research, yet the differences between them are not been clearly distinguished. However, essential in acknowledging the differences of these concepts is looking at how they refer slightly to different cultural phenomena, even though the object of art is the same. I approach graffiti culture as an umbrella concept that includes graffiti subculture, but also institutional art, such as gallery exhibitions and other forms of permitted graffiti. With the graffiti subculture, I refer to unauthorized graffiti and its distinct social practices. Often, graffiti writers participate in both cultures, bridging the two, hence constituting an overlapping body between them. In the current study, I mainly look at the graffiti subculture, but the graffiti culture is importantly present because there is a constant dialogue between these two cultures. Understanding graffiti as a form of diversity is important for acknowledging the distinct cultural capitals associated with graffiti, which often represents different meanings based on whether it is being discussed in the graffiti culture or graffiti subculture.

In the present article, I explore graffiti writers' subcultural capital and its meanings when graffiti writing is strictly controlled. My aim is to understand *how subcultural capital in graffiti writing is constructed through a subcultural knowledge process in a zero tolerance milieu*. Next, I present the developments of graffiti research and its association with cultural criminology and national graffiti research. I then discuss zero tolerance and subcultural capital in the context of crime prevention. Then, I describe the study's ethnographic methodology and my access to the field. In the analysis, I distinguish the ways graffiti writers produce subcultural information and create graffiti knowledge in a zero tolerance context. In conclusion, I reflect on the current state of graffiti in Helsinki.

Graffiti studies in a framework of cultural criminology

Jeff Ferrell (1996, 1998), a contributor to cultural criminology, is a leading international scholar on graffiti studies. Ferrell's research on graffiti seeks to analyze the motives of graffiti writers, but it also portrays the confrontations between the graffiti subculture and broader society. Nancy Macdonald (2002) has explored how illegal graffiti is a precondition for the continuation of a subcultural agency, where the condition of illegality supports the constructions of masculine identities among graffiti writers. Cecilie Høigård (2007) makes similar interpretations in her book *Gategallerier*. According to Høigård (2007, 453), illegality is central to the graffiti subculture because it is through the prohibition of graffiti that the subculture has been able to develop its unique activities; it is in this context that zero tolerance policy has constructed graffiti writers as a criminal youth class. The above-mentioned graffiti studies (Ferrell 1996; Høigård 2007; Macdonald 2002) considers graffiti writing and the control policies that govern graffiti writers as a dynamic interaction, one that is characteristic of analyzing crime in the paradigm of cultural criminology (Ferrell et al. 2004; Honkatukia & Suurpää 2007, 10).

Finnish graffiti research has chiefly developed in cycles. Few studies on graffiti were conducted prior to the zero tolerance period (e.g., Lähteenmaa 1991; Isomursu & Jääskeläinen 1998); however, during the Stop töhryille project, almost no research on graffiti can be found. This may indicate that maintaining an open discussion on graffiti became problematic in Finland during the project. After the end of the project, the public debate has been more flexible, and the interest in researching graffiti subcultures has increased (e.g., Helin 2014; Komonen 2012; Koskela 2009; Malinen 2011).

Contemporary research on graffiti subcultures approach graffiti writing as a dialogue—or as a nondialogue—between the subculture and society. Hille Koskela (2009) has analyzed the city policies related to the Stop töhrylle project and criminalization of youth cultures. The concept of the *graffiti war* has since emerged in other studies, which also examine the control policies of the urban space and the opposing resistance (Hirvonen 2011, 299). Combating graffiti is seen as an attempt to maintain order and discipline in the urban space. In these studies, the graffiti culture is identified as a broader social question, and one goal in the studies is to analyze crime prevention methods against youth cultures, hence considering how young people in general should be addressed in society. When studying the confrontations between youth cultures and most of the population from the perspective of cultural criminology, crime prevention and security should be built on cultural understanding, pluralism, and a reduction of prejudices (Koskela 2009, 232). Thus, cultural criminology seeks to avoid unnecessary regulations, suggesting cultural practices and creativity that do no harm should be allowed (Koskela 2009, 233).

The current situation in Helsinki is very different compared with the zero tolerance era, and graffiti in legal forms is now more appreciated. Legal painting sites in Helsinki have been established since 2009, and by 2014, the city began operating eleven legal walls. The changing graffiti policy has been studied by Mika Helin (2014) in his study “Legal graffiti in Helsinki,” which examines the users of the city’s legal graffiti walls. The study represents the diversity of the graffiti subculture and challenges the image of graffiti writers as exclusively criminal and young.

Subcultural capital

Pierre Bourdieu (1986) developed distinct concepts for assessing different types of capital in society: economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital. Economic capital refers to property and material production, while cultural capital describes the production of cultural values, such as the knowledge and skills relating to traditions and education. Social capital refers to human networking and the relationships of “who knows who.” Symbolic capital embodies the field of in which other forms of capital are processed into what is being recognized in society. Thus, cultural capital must be legitimated in society to produce symbolic capital. Bourdieu claims that the different forms of capital produce resources for individuals, in turn generating social structures and power relations; they also manifest in conflicts in different social fields, where taste and style signify social class.

The concept of subcultural capital, which is based on Bourdieu’s notion of different capitals, was launched and developed by Sarah Thornton (1997) in her study on British rave and club cultures. Thornton considers subcultural capital as a subcultural knowledge formation that evolves with subcultural success, thus reinforcing subcultural status. Subcultural knowledge refers to expertise on who and what is “in.” For Thornton (1997, 201), class conflicts are not a prerequisite for subcultures; however, she concedes that they do appear in society. Thornton (1997, 204) argues that the differences between a subculture and mainstream culture is a question of age and gender rather than a marker of social class. A class perspective, which refers to a Marxist perspective of subcultures, proposes that subcultures are the result of conflicts between social classes. Hence, the critique of Thornton’s conceptualization of subcultures has focused on the lack of attention on subcultural members’ social markers and the structural affections of society (Jensen 2006; Skeggs 2004, 150).

Thornton (1997, 203) states that subcultural capital is, much like Bourdieu’s conceptualization of cultural capital, possible to transmit to economic capital. However, Beverley Skeggs (2004, 150) claims that subcultural capital is always class bound, and all forms of capital do not have the same possibilities to

legitimize subcultural capital; thus, from an economical profit perspective, the structures of capitals and social networks are not equally resourced to everyone. Skeggs (2004, 150) asserts that mainly the middle class may utilize subcultural capital, despite the subculture being grounded in a working-class culture. The “death” of the punk subculture and its commercialization in the 1980s may serve as an example. The punk subculture initially sought to differentiate itself from the mainstream culture; however, increasing popularization and marketization co-opted the subculture, leading to punk music and fashion becoming a consumer commodity for youth (e.g., Clark 2003; McRobbie 1994). Nevertheless, Skeggs (2004, 150) states that not all subcultures are continuously modified into consumer goods if the practitioners of the subculture revolt against commodification.

There is a frequent subcultural negotiation between legal and illegal graffiti. Proponents of illegal graffiti claim that social acceptance leads to the economic exploitation of the subculture. Graffiti writers in Macdonald’s (2002, 173) study stayed distant from institutionalized graffiti when defending their subculture from commercialization. This is what Macdonald (2002, 170) calls the *strategy of distance*. This is a key for the graffiti subculture’s coping with commercialization and their attempts to achieve authenticity. Graffiti writers build their own community as an alternative outside the dominant culture while creating rules and norms that are barely understood by outsiders. Thereby, the subcultural members establish a unique expertise about themselves, which is only advantageous within their subculture. Social acceptance signifies a threat to the graffiti subculture, which obtains its power out of its illegality. According to Macdonald (2002, 173), graffiti writers painting without permission get their subcultural significance from the social disapproval of graffiti. Consequently, when no cultural value for graffiti is present in the mainstream culture, then no economic appraisal is attached to the subculture.

Subcultural capital has been connected to the so-called post-subcultural debate and the emergence of postmodernist influences in subcultural research (Blackman 2014, 504). Cultural criminology has sought to differentiate itself from post-subcultural research because this research field has emphasized the merchandising effects in its analysis of subcultural identity (Blackman 2014, 506). Consequently, there is a greater need for critical research on social inequalities when exploring subcultures in late capitalism. When assessing subcultural capital, the essential question should relate to what subcultural capital is, who is part of it, and how it is utilized economically. In other words, it is necessary to study the mechanisms that potentially convert subcultural capital into economic capital because doing this shows how different types of capitals are distributed in society.

Zero tolerance as a crime prevention method

The origins of zero tolerance as a crime prevention method can be found in Georg Kelling and James Q. Wilson’s (1982) article “The police and neighborhood safety: Broken windows.” This perspective on crime prevention was later developed in the book *Fixing Broken Windows* (Kelling & Coles 1997). According to the “broken windows” theory, also referred to as the “New York model,” society must actively and vigorously fight all petty crime because negligence in doing so leads to more serious crimes. The zero tolerance theory simply proposes that districts accepting notorious street gangs, alcoholics, and prostitutes construct a ground for organized crime; this is why all forms of deviancy must be fought effectively and quickly by policing, surveillance, and implementing brutal penalties. The primary object of this crime prevention model is, above all, the social order of public space.

Jock Young (2011, 111–130) has criticized the zero tolerance perspective approach toward crime prevention as a simplistic tool for fighting deviancy. In political rhetoric, a zero tolerance perspective differentiates crime, making it not part of society and placing a zero tolerance policy as a straightforward solution to

deviancy. Crime is, however, complex, and preventative means should take place by influencing social structures and developing welfare in society. Studies on Western welfare policies have underlined a paradigmatic shift of approaching social problems as anomalies because of a lack of control, thus emphasizing order and security policies, rather than perceiving them as a result of structural inequalities (Garland 2001).

Art historian Jacob Kimwall (2012, 21–22) proposes that zero tolerance against graffiti is embedded in three pillars: 1) the systematic and effective removal of graffiti in both public and private spaces, 2) growth of crime prevention against graffiti, and 3) prohibition of legal graffiti. However, as a fourth and principal pillar, Kimwall suggests *propaganda* as a major means of combating graffiti, which is usually accomplished in projects or campaigns. It seeks to alter public consciousness of graffiti by distributing information on “graffiti vandalism” and marketing effective preventative methods. Projects are often proposed by municipal, mass transportation companies and police departments. In 1998, Stockholm organized a Nordic conference on graffiti vandalism, presenting zero tolerance as a method to combat graffiti. Finnish delegates were also present at the conference, and a guest lecture presented by New York’s police presented their experiences of zero tolerance on graffiti (Väisänen 1998). In the same year, Helsinki established the Stop töhryille project for combating graffiti, which took zero tolerance as its main line of action. All four pillars presented by Kimwall are recognizable in the Stop töhryille project, despite zero tolerance not publicly being presented as a policy against graffiti (see Mäkinen 2010, 58–60).

Graffiti is not the only phenomenon that has been combated using a zero tolerance policy in Finland; it has been implemented in some cities’ security plans as well. Timo Korander and Seppo Soine-Rajanummi (2002) study zero tolerance policy against binge drinking in Tampere and reflect upon how this policy perspective usually targets people with less power in society. Koskela (2009, 280–282) describes how the competence of specific crime prevention policies are regularly demonstrated by targeting youth cultures because they are understood to be “easy” targets for crime control. As part of this process, Koskela (2009) defines *the politics of fear* as a way to present youth as a threat in public discourses, hence supporting the promotion of zero tolerance policies. The politics of fear is not merely criminalizing particular acts, but also entire cultures (Koskela 2009, 284).

During the time frame of the Stop töhryille project (1998–2008), it is essential to explore the graffiti culture’s criminalization. Criminalizing cultures refers to regulating specific acts, such as listening to music or painting graffiti in the wrong places (Koskela 2009, 284; Presdee 2000). For example, the national Public Order Act (13 §), constituted in 2003, states: “*Possession of spray paints and paints or other substances highly suitable for painting graffiti on the property of others is prohibited in a public place without a valid reason.*” This act gave patrolling police the right to confiscate spray paint and fine a person for possession; however, it is up to the police to define what a valid reason for carrying spray paint in a public space is. The fine may be opposed by appealing to a district court, which comes with the risk of additional court costs (Hirvonen 2011).

Koskela (2009, 287) states that the criminalization of cultures is further generated by *the politics of language*. During the Stop töhryille project, the administrators for the Helsinki municipal were, instead of using the concept graffiti, consistently using “*töhry*”⁴ as the term for describing graffiti as an illegal act. The term “*töhry*” has evolved in public discourses to denote graffiti (Helin 2014, 42). In addition, the Public

⁴ “*Töhry*” = dirt, smudge, or poor aesthetics. However, during the “Stop töhryille” project, this term became the same as *graffiti vandalism*.

Works Department (HKR) developed the term “habitual graffiti vandal,”⁵ who, according to a spokesperson of the Stop töhryille project, are “(a)dult men, who vandalize walls, street constructions, buses and everything else just for fun and without any motive” (Kauko Nygrén in HS 20.2.2007). Another example of criminalizing graffiti in Helsinki is the closing of a graffiti exhibition at the modern art museum *Kiasma* and the removal of legal graffiti murals in the public space (Koskela 2009, 290–291). Similar incidents against the graffiti culture occurred in Stockholm, where the city refused to provide facilities for events related to “*klotter*”⁶ (Kimwall 2012, 81–93).

Although the Stop töhryille project officially ended in 2008, its political lines have partly continued in the “Clean City”⁷ project (e.g., Helin 2014, 49–53). This is reflected, for example, in the fact that graffiti writers are not allowed into mediation process as an alternative to a crime court process unless one is a first-time offender and of minor age. However, being classified as a “habitual graffiti vandal” by HKR prevents access to mediation (Brunila et al. 2011, 114). Although the city of Helsinki no longer implements an autocratic form of zero tolerance against graffiti, the social impacts of the project will be long-lasting in the case of graffiti writers’ crime sentences. In addition, VR⁸ has never given up on zero tolerance (Ylen uutiset 28.09.2009). Thus, zero tolerance can be approached as an ongoing discourse that transcends political perspectives and the decision making associated with a locality.

The ethnographic approach and access to the field

Ethnography is defined differently in a variety of disciplines (Lappalainen 2007, 9); it is often approached as a methodology that distinctively affects the research process and research aims. In an ethnographic research process, the analysis is interweaved between the research material, theory, and interpretation (Lappalainen 2007, 13). It is also a research design that brings forth research theory and political interpretations, as well the researcher’s own understanding of power dimensions, ethics, and research responsibility (Lander 2006, 26; Lappalainen 2007, 10; Skeggs 1997, 23). My ethnographic research approach has subsequently affected my own perceptions of the graffiti subculture. Moreover, it has critically influenced my interpretations of to whom graffiti belongs, who is governing graffiti, and how the meanings of graffiti change according to legal or illegal scales. Hence, ethnography also is describing a research setting that is both an intellectual interpretation and a moral perception of a spatially attached fieldwork (Hietala 2013, 36; Ortner 1995).

Conducting fieldwork is distinctive to ethnography. The researcher must become familiar with the research subject and learn the social performances based on the distinctive cultural and social regimes in which these performances are found. This includes participatory observation and interpretations of internal experiences in the field (Lappalainen 2007, 10; Atkinson et al. 2001; Skeggs 2001, 426). Defining the exact field boundaries is difficult in cultural research (Malinen 2011, 43), and the researcher cannot simply step into a culture and then leave. Similarly, assessing strict boundaries between fieldwork and an analytical process is impossible (Pink 2001, 79). I will, nevertheless, use the term “field” because it illustrates the space of the research process that the researcher aims for when collecting information about a culture (Tolonen & Palmu 2007, 89).

⁵ In Finnish, “*Tapatöhrijä*.” The prefix “*tapa*” refers to habit, and “*töhrijä*” is the agent noun for “*töhry*,” thus *habitual graffiti vandal*.

⁶ In Swedish the concept “*klotter*” is equal to “*töhry*.” It is consistently used in administrative language to displace the concept of graffiti.

⁷ In Finnish, *Siisti stadi* projekti.

⁸ Short for “*Valtion Rautatiet*,” a state-owned railway company.

There is a constant debate about the form and amount of fieldwork, as well as what kind of research work can be called ethnographic (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007, 3; Honkasalo 2008). In ethnographic research, information and material can be gathered in many ways, but a chief principle is that the researcher must spend time in the field and write field notes about the culture they are researching. In my view, ethnographic research requires an active presence in the field and, in part, participation in the culture for a certain time. In this way, the researcher learns about the phenomena they are studying in interacting with the research participants, often in a style that is difficult to achieve with other types of research methods. The strength of ethnographic research is that data are collected directly from the people who have first-hand information about the culture being studied (e.g., Puuronen 2000, 215–216).

Attending the field can be portrayed as a negotiation process, where the researcher's goal is to earn a place among the research participants (Tolonen & Palmu 2007, 89); this process is important to describe because it describes the researcher's positions and relationships with the field. I became interested in graffiti in the early 2000s when I became friends with graffiti writers in my home town. I was truly captivated by the transgressive stories these graffiti writers told of other graffiti writers they met in Helsinki, about the methods of the security guards, and of zero tolerance. In 2005, when I moved to study in Helsinki, I got in contact with a local graffiti writer when I was about to fetch his graffiti magazine of my home town. Slowly, my interest in the graffiti subculture grew as, at the pubs of Kallio, I became familiar with the friends of my local contact, who were also writing graffiti. They had more enthralling stories to tell about chases and the transgressive experiences of writing graffiti on trains and along the railway tracks. The zero tolerance policy apparently did not stop them from writing graffiti, and I wanted to know why. Choosing ethnography as a research method seemed an obvious choice because I was partly familiar with the research field and was already creating a relationship with the research subject.

Although I had partly gained access to the field, starting the actual fieldwork was intermittently difficult. Describing the process of ethnographic research and gaining the trust of graffiti writers felt challenging at first. Not surprisingly, many graffiti writers were taking a suspicious attitude toward my research. An “outsider” interested in the illegal activities of the graffiti writers' community is enough to sound the alarms. However, a turning point was when the graffiti writers invited me to photograph a graffiti-painted train in the autumn of 2011. It was important for them to get the train photographed because it was a way for them to archive their art pieces before they were washed away. I then began photographing more graffiti-painted trains at train stations and along the railway tracks together with some graffiti writers. I was not present at the train yards or at the depots where the actual train painting performance occurred, but I was actively participating afterwards when the trains were taken into traffic because then, it was possible to photograph the graffiti-painted trains in public spaces. These photographing missions, when the graffiti-painted trains were spotted in traffic, took from one to five hours.

It was not my initial plan to photograph train graffiti, but this gave me a good reason for participating in the graffiti writers' field. Subsequently, I earned the trust of five graffiti writers who gave me permission to write notes on our mutual conversations; they could be described as key informants and coresearchers of the current study; that is, I was conducting the study together with the research participants. Coresearching has been described as an interactive process between the research participants and the researcher that aims to maintain openness for different research guidance and epistemological ways of knowing (Banks 2001; Tolonen & Palmu 2007, 104). Photographing trains grounded my conversations with the graffiti writers and disclosed the practices of train painting. For example, Gillian Rose (2007, 238) proposes that photographs as visual data may support, confirm, and expand on the researchers' observations and interviewing data. My research method became close to visual ethnography, where a major part of the research material was conducted by photographing and video shooting. Essential in visual ethnography is that the images as such

do not represent an objective knowledge but construct specific meanings with the study participants' interpretations, thus shaping ethnographic knowledge in an interaction between the researcher and field (Pink 2001, 35–36). Encountering a painted train at a train station was an exciting moment for both me and the graffiti writers, which framed the discussions after the photographing expedition. With the help of the images, my coresearchers were then able to describe how the actual painting mission had gone, what went wrong, and assess the success of the photographing performance. At the same time, I was able to give the photographs I took to the graffiti writers. For example, feminist and reflexive ethnography underlines that researchers should actively seek to give something back to the field because it may balance the power structures between the researcher and researched (Pink 2001, 23; Skeggs 2008; Lander 2006).

I wrote notes on the field for about a year, starting in the fall of 2011 and lasting until the end of 2012. Beyond my key informants, I met around twenty other graffiti writers. Although their discussions were not directly part of my research material, their presence on the field inevitably affected my perception and understanding of the subculture. The age range of the graffiti writers I met was between eighteen and thirty-five years old, and they were predominantly males. In total, the field notes consisted of about fifty pages in a Word document. During the fieldwork, I regularly wrote notes reflecting on events, discussions with informants, and the customs of the graffiti subculture, assessing them in relation to my own perspectives. I studied the language of the informants, the graffiti slang, and their way of observing walls and passing subways or trains; I learned to look for new or “buffed” graffiti pieces and tags. During the time period, I also watched graffiti movies, read a lot of literature on the subject, studied graffiti magazines, and followed Internet sites that published graffiti images.

Because in ethnographic research the collection of data can be conducted in very diverse ways, it is important to find the way that best fits the culture being researched. In my research approach, I was not guiding the conversations with the informants, and I let them decide the topics for discussion. I also did not record the conversations, and thus, the quotes are based on notes I mostly wrote outside the field. Because of the sensitive material relating to my research participants' illicit acts, it was extremely important to guarantee their anonymity and that I took care of the research material so that it would not end up in the hands of outsiders. Therefore, I was usually not writing notes while I was in the field but when I was in a place where I was able to secure the material. Moreover, the field was very mobile, and writing notes would be challenging when gamboling with my coresearchers at train stations and along tracksides. For example, Ingrid Lander (2006, 33) warns against writing notes in the field because it may affect the trust-building between the researcher and the research field when the researcher pays more attention to the notebook than to the participant.

It is obvious that the researcher in the field encounters illegal activities when the case is criminological field research. The researcher must either accept such encounters or pursue a different research topic or research method. Confidentiality and the protection of the research participants are fundamental to all scientific research, including when studying criminality (Kuula 2006, 96–97). In cultural criminology, the term “edgework” describes the ethnographic process when researchers participate in the activities of a criminal field (Ferrell & Hamm 1998). Edgework has a long tradition in subcultural research (e.g., Becker 1963; Polsky 1967; Whyte 1943), and it has also been used as a research method in Finland; Jussi Perälä (2011) spent years in drug houses observing the use and sale of drugs, and Heli Vaaranen (2004) sat on board when joyriders were speeding with their cars on icy roads. According to Ferrell (1998, 30), ethnographic edgework allows for a criminological *verstehen*, that is, the understanding of the field in which the researcher immerses themselves in while facing the same risks as their research subjects by sharing them as social experiences together. Taking photographs at train stations was not a risk-free activity, and sometimes, train drivers or conductors yelled, showed us a fist, or even flipped their middle finger at us. The graffiti

writers were then in a hurry to leave the station before the authorities were called. In addition to the practice of photographing train graffiti, I saw graffiti writers sometimes bombing on the streets. I also followed them to abandoned houses and buildings that they had embraced as informal painting sites, the so-called hall of fames. I also tried graffiti writing on public street art walls.

Graffiti knowledge—The subcultural capital of graffiti

Young adults' desire for visibility and competition has been suggested as a major driving force for painting graffiti (Høigård 2007, 35; Jacobson 2003, 6; Malinen 2011, 173; Macdonald 2002, 68–71). Other reasons for doing graffiti have also been emphasized, such as the aesthetic experience, emotions of success and the significance of social connotations (Helin 2014, 82; Malinen 2011, 168; Isomursu & Jääskeläinen 1998, 58). Malinen (2011, 175) states that there are probably as many reasons for painting graffiti as there are graffiti writers. However, when discussing graffiti in the context of crime prevention, the concept of “fame” is often presented as an important motivation for graffiti writing. In the current study, fame denotes subcultural visibility, in other words, how prominent a graffiti writer's tag is in the streets, on the Internet, or in graffiti magazines. Although the definition of fame varies based on different studies, Helin (2014, 83) sees it as a process of peer evaluation of the quantity and quality of a graffiti writer's work, which is also essentially associated with subcultural respect. Malinen (2011, 66, 72) distinguishes fame as a subcultural reputation, although different than respect. Chiefly, fame and respect describe the subcultural position of a graffiti writer, which, to some extent, tells something about what kind of subcultural capital an individual possesses.

The interaction between subcultural capital and zero tolerance is best approached when looking at the spatial impact of zero tolerance on the visibility of graffiti. The spokespersons of zero tolerance usually refer to the motivation of fame when stating that visible graffiti increases graffiti writing in a subcultural competition between young people. This perspective relies on situational crime prevention models and characterizes human behavior as routinized, while approaching the complexity of the subculture in a simplified way when supposing that the culture will eventually decrease when the visible forms of communication between members is prevented by the consistent removal of graffiti (Smith 2001, 171).

The ways of communicating between subcultural members are more comprehensive, and not only is visible graffiti in urban space a way to sustain discussions, but the invisibility of graffiti also builds subcultural knowledge and understanding. For example, empty tracksides say something about the city's strategy against graffiti. In a zero tolerance landscape, subcultural capital can also be the knowledge of how to paint trains under strict surveillance. The details of train traffic and track lines construct different possibilities for graffiti writing, which, by graffiti writers, is approached as a specific kind of graffiti knowledge. In the current study, the knowledge of who was painting and where someone had painted was not constructed solely on the visibility of graffiti and in a physical presence, but by seeing the images of graffiti and through conversations and rumors among graffiti writers. The interface with zero tolerance constructed specific forms of subcultural knowledge that generated new meanings for graffiti writing. Next, I will use ethnographic notes to exemplify the construction of subcultural capital as a carnivalistic experience in interaction with control.

The carnival of graffiti and control

Joint risk-taking and experiencing an adrenaline rush were important experiences for graffiti writers at a younger age because they underlined subcultural belonging in specific ways. Ferrell (1998) suggests that a subcultural association consists of intense social emotions in which risk experiences and coping with them outline membership and belonging to a subculture. These experiences were often told among graffiti writers

through storytelling, so that after one story, another graffiti writer continued with a new story that was even more thrilling. In this way, the graffiti writers strove to tell the fiercest experience. In the below note, a graffiti writer describes how, at a younger age, he was “bombing”⁹ inside a train carriage full of passengers:

We took the train from A [station] and bombed crazily right away. At B [station], that crone conductor came, but that wasn't any problem, though she tried to say something. Then, she went to the codger conductor, and they slowed down the train. That codger yelled that we're busted now, but we yelled back that he'll fucking get stabbed! My friend hit the can on his head and when we were slowing down for C [station], we saw at every door there was a rent-a-cop waiting for us at the platform. They were so stupid, not knowing that we could break the doors on the trackside with the emergency opening. We just jumped down on the tracks and ran away, and I bombed a last thing on the side. Later, I was of course interrogated about the thing, and Karppinen¹⁰ was all mad about it. Yeah, I think I was sentenced for it, too, got a vandalism and assault.

The story reveals the informants' skills and technology on how trains work. The graffiti writers knew that an emergency opening of the doors enabled them to escape by jumping down on the tracks, defeating both the guards and conductors. Gender division is also present in the story. They did not care about the female conductor, “*though she tried to say something*,” and the actual battle was fought with the “*codger conductor*” and the guards. For example, Macdonald (2002, 104–105) and Høigård (2007, 362) associate the competition and risk-taking in the pursuit of subcultural respect as the constructs of masculinity. Stories like this were often told with laughter and amusement while representing one's own cleverness with pride; yet at the same time, youth as a specific time was sketched out as a way of larking around. Mike Presdee (2000, 38) describes subcultures as creative solutions to highly organized societies. Accordingly, subcultures provide momentary opportunities to act outside of society, which invites people to look for radical forms of fun. Presdee (2000, 50) calls this a carnival of crimes that manifests as ritual-like spectacular violations of norms, thereby celebrating wrongdoing.

Carnivalistic edge experiences and taking unnecessary risks diminished as their subcultural membership stabilized. Graffiti writers considered the risk of getting caught to be a serious and avoidable matter; however, they often learned the hard way. Getting caught for graffiti was considered the mistakes of youth, for those who had yet to achieve enough subcultural knowledge to avoid these situations. One graffiti writer commented on some younger writers as follows: “*Those do some walls and bombs a lot, but they get often caught. I guess you got to learn the hard way.*” On the other hand, the first time getting caught was sometimes described as “*cell training*,” testing the graffiti writer's loyalty to the subculture. A writer's subcultural credibility appeared more solid if he or she continued despite getting caught and kept painting in the future without getting caught. In the next notes, two graffiti writers make a distinction between the risk taken when being drunk and young and the more discretionary actions taken at an older age:

When you was younger, you did whatever and everywhere. You'd keep your cans with you all the time, even when there was no plan for anything. Now, I'll only keep cans with me if I am for real going to do something (...) I don't want to get in trouble for nothing. If you're drunk, you'll get excited, and the fuck it's not a good idea to keep cans with you then. Better to leave them at home; don't want to get jailed!

⁹ Bombing = Writing several tags.

¹⁰ Pseudonym for a security chief of a train company VR, which is well-known amongst local graffiti writers.

Well, at this point, you've learned that you'll get jailed if you continue like this. It's easy for FPS¹¹ to follow you if they know you're bombing all the time when you go out, so they don't need to do anything else than watch you on a Friday night when you're drunk and wait at your regular pub or in front of your house. But if you paint a train once a week, they can't follow you 24 hours.

Drinking and bombing together strengthen group unity and uphold a cohesion between younger graffiti writers and their constructed masculinity in symbolic ways while demonstrating a boundary to outsiders of the subculture in a similar way as Antti Maunu's (2011, 18) interpretations of street battles by vocational students. However, as subcultural membership settled, bombing in the city no longer brought a similar level of satisfaction, and the graffiti writers shifted to more competent forms of painting. Instead of doing many tags, a complex work was made, a "*piece*"¹² at the trackside or on the side of a train. In Malinen's (2011, 170–171) study, early-age bombing is approached as an illegal stage for graffiti writers, after which graffiti writing shifts to emphasize the aesthetic experiences, while orienting toward less illegal forms of graffiti. In the current study, the transition from an early bombing stage to graffiti piecing was no less illegal, but the visibility and risk-taking associated with the graffiti writing was constructed differently.

The stories exemplifying graffiti writers' confrontations with security guards, police, and other authorities illustrate the conflicts between the subculture and mainstream society. The graffiti writers were particularly expressing antagonisms against the security company FPS that had given several witness statements during the zero tolerance project and in large court cases against graffiti writers. Many graffiti writers were able to identify and name several guards and police officers, yet so did the guards and police identify them in turn. Catchphrases of the security company and graffiti police were often added to graffiti pieces. Some graffiti writers described how the guards in civilian clothes were sometimes following them, even to their own front doors. When the writers encountered guards on the streets, greetings by one's surname or tag-name were exchanged, in turn emphasizing the subcultural reputation and personalizing the relationship between graffiti writers and their foe. When a graffiti writer becomes the city's most "wanted," police work offers a specific source for subcultural respect and fame (Macdonald 2002, 124–125). Macdonald (2002) refers to James Messerschmidt (1993, 175) and accentuates the meaning of police work for constructing masculinity as a struggle for power and manhood between the graffiti writers and the police that is performed on the streets. The fierce control over graffiti writing seemed to reinforce constructions of masculinity; however, the amount of respect received was contingent on if one was able to avoid getting caught. Macdonald (2002, 191) also notes that a careless attitude toward imprisonment may complicate the meaning of the subculture because getting caught then no longer offers a liberative experience of graffiti writing. Getting caught was not indifferent for my informants either because it was affiliated with their sense of a respectable self-control and integrity.

Trains as subcultural knowledge

Trains and subways have always been one of the most prestigious painting objects for graffiti writers (e.g., Isomursu & Jääskeläinen 1998, 54; Macdonald 2002, 83; Malinen 2011, 96), here following the tradition of New York's 1970s subway graffiti art (Helin 2014, 16; Naar 2007). For my informants, the local commuter train in the Helsinki metropolitan area and the Helsinki metro were the best painting objects. A so-called "*panel*," the space below the windows on a train carriage, was considered by many as the perfect surface for a graffiti piece. The Helsinki metro was appreciated extensively, and one graffiti writer stated, "*One panel on a Finnish metro is better than ten other metro panels in total.*" It is notable that in my field notes, there is

¹¹ Short for the former security company Finnish Protection Service.

¹² Piece = Or "masterpiece," a graffiti painting featuring several colors, stylized letters, and a variety of designs.

nevertheless hardly any direct quotes for why trains were the most prestigious objects to paint. This may partly be because of the fact that painting trains was so obvious for my informants that there was no reason to justify this in the discussions. However, *Trama*, one of the most well-known graffiti writers in Finland, talks about painting trains in *Helsinki Graffiti* (Isomursu - Jääskeläinen 1998, 97):

You can always paint a train just for fun, it's just so much better feeling to paint a train. Even if it was in traffic for just an hour, if you get a photo of it, then it's enough. And if it doesn't get into traffic, then you can't do nothing. It's still as much a vex for VR. The main point is that they get painted.

The quote describes how painting trains is not merely based on achieving fame but about the experience of doing the graffiti piece. At times, it has been suggested that subway graffiti has diminished in New York as a result of efficient cleaning (Gastman & Neelon 2011, 29; Snyder 2006, 93; Iveson 2010, 129). According to a zero tolerance perspective, the motive for painting graffiti on subways has been reduced when they become less visible, thereby not offering a source for fame. However, for my informants, the visibility of train graffiti was not always necessarily the purpose for painting trains, and sometimes, it was even better that other graffiti writers did not see them. VR implements zero tolerance on graffiti, and graffiti-painted carriages are removed from service as soon as possible. This restricts a certain flow of subcultural knowledge and benefits those graffiti writers who are established train painters and want to keep their train painting skills secret. However, because graffiti writers were constantly observing their city, public transportation, and trackside walls, they sometimes were able to spot train graffiti by other writers. When spotting a painted train, it was important to find out where and how the train was painted:

"Hi!" Hessu¹³ says and shake my hand. He turns to Tomi and explains that just a moment before he spotted few panels before meeting us. "At the central station, at least three [pieces], two color [pieces] and one chrome [piece]." Hessu speaks quickly and seems agitated. "Well? Let's go and look?" Tomi says, like it would be a self-evident thing to do. The boys decide to walk along the tracks in case "they" would pass us. Tomi asks Hessu if he knew on what line the panels were rolling.¹⁴ "Don't know. I was in the tram on Mannerheim road and saw them from a distance. I didn't see the panels well." I ask if it's important to know on which line the panels are rolling on. "Yes, because then you know when they're done." "Is that good to know?" "Yeah, you got to know where the gang is painting. And who."

The graffiti writers had very accurate information about train schedules and were able to track the movements of different trains. When spotting a painted train, it was possible to find out where it was painted depending on the time and train line. It was essential to find out where the train was painted because it informed the graffiti writers about how often particular train depots were being painted. This was important for the writers' safety because it would not be wise to paint at the same train depot the next night again. "*Raping the spot*," in other words, painting too often at the same site, could increase surveillance; thus, this was something that the graffiti writers avoided. When graffiti writers spotted unknown panels, several hours were sometimes spent along the tracks to possibly spot the paintings again and find out more about the train's movements and which writers might have been doing the graffiti pieces.

The intense observing of the train traffic created specific kind of subcultural knowledge. The more information there was about how the "system" worked, the more opportunities were found to paint the train. A graffiti writer who figured out or came up with a new idea to paint the train demonstrated subcultural dedication. Such graffiti knowledge did not develop instantly but was the result of years of practice. Information about a good train painting site was kept within small peer groups and was not disseminated to

¹³ All persons in the field notes are anonymized.

¹⁴ Rolling = Train in traffic.

everyone. In the next note, a graffiti writer explains how he experienced a kind of tacit knowledge of the train system together with another graffiti writer:

First, I was a bit suspicious about this guy cause he was speaking too much about everything, so I wasn't sure if he could be trusted. At some point, I realized that this dude knows fucking a lot about things. Like one time when we're hanging out on the line with a posse and an empty train passed us, and I saw how this guy thought about where that train came from. First, I was like "what" when I saw he was stuck in something, but then I realized too what was up, and I was like "oh, yeah." He didn't say anything, but I knew what he was thinking about.

This incidence manifested as a mutual experience of subcultural knowledge that did not necessitate verbal communication. The informant appreciated the cleverness of his peer in spotting a train running "empty," that is, without passengers. Thus, the train was either being removed from service or transferred to another traffic line. For graffiti writers, all irregular traffic movements create additional understandings of the train system. However, such irregularities in traffic could only be noticed by a trained pair of eyes.

Images as controlled fame

Graffiti writers' photographs of their graffiti pieces are their treasures. Photographing train graffiti was particularly important because the image was proof that the art piece had once existed. The time afforded for photographing train graffiti was limited because graffiti-painted carriages were quickly removed from service; thus, the graffiti writers carefully studied the traffic schedules. Choosing the location for photographing the train was cautiously planned to ensure a successful photo shooting. The direction of the sunlight or lighting at the train station were considered in advance. Photographing trains required resiliency, and a painted train was eagerly awaited, keeping an eye on watches, while shaking of either excitement or the cool weather. One could never be completely sure if the painted train would arrive at a station, and at times, a painted train was never seen in the daylight. The writers then disappointedly left for home, even if they had "night photos" of the graffiti piece taken directly at the painting site. Taking "traffic photos" was not always important or enjoyable for everyone. Some graffiti writers were too tired of doing the photographing job; then, the remaining writer could state, "*I'm annoyed by that everyone just assumes, that their pieces will also get photographed!*" The photographing expedition was ponderous work because the graffiti writers often stayed up all night, first painting the train and then waiting for the train at the station in the morning. Additional pressure was brought by the station's surveillance cameras, which were dodged using hoodies.

The graffiti subculture's creation of media is a response to graffiti removal. According to Gregory Snyder (2006, 94), the graffiti magazines developed in Philadelphia were a reaction to antigraffiti enforcement. Producing magazines has offered a space for in which the community, knowledge, and group solidarity are developed among graffiti writers, who, in mainstream society, are otherwise subjected to moralizations. Finnish graffiti magazines are published every few years. During 2006–2013, graffiti magazines such as *Boiling Point*, *Sisu*, *Anti-Social*, *Drips*, and *Problems of Society* appeared. The names of the magazines reflect the societal status of graffiti and a certain ability to demonstrate subcultural self-irony. Above all, they provided a space to carnivalize graffiti and celebrate wrongdoing.

It was prestigious to get your graffiti picture published in a graffiti magazine because the editor would ultimately decide which graffiti pieces would be published. Printed graffiti magazines were appreciated more than online platforms, which were perceived as more accessible. However, complex rules were involved in the publishing of graffiti images, and these rules were considered before submitting an image to a magazine.

Meticulous and intricate train graffiti pieces spoke of a good painting spot: “*That is a fucking good panel that you might not send it in a magazine!*” Certain painting sites may disappear when changes in train traffic occur. This made it easier for publishing because the subcultural content of the image had then expired. Graffiti magazines were often browsed with other graffiti writers. By looking at and discussing different pictures, one was able to develop subcultural knowledge, such as the location for the photographing site. The station and train model informed the train line and, hence, where the train had been painted. The lighting on the picture and the passengers’ clothing exposed what time of year the photograph had been taken.

Graffiti magazines describe what is happening in the subculture, who is painting, where one is painting, and how often the writers paint. Graffiti magazines can be understood as the new targets for graffiti writers, in which fame and endorsement are achieved (Snyder 2009, 148). The potential audience for a graffiti piece in its physical site is less important when an image is printed by a magazine and can reach thousands of viewers. Ferrell and Robert Wiede (2010, 59) define graffiti media as *liquid spots*, suggesting that the spatiality of graffiti is blurred by graffiti media and detached from the classifications that conventionally value respected objects in the subculture. For example, a picture of a painted train may be a “*trash train*” that is to be demolished at a junkyard. Compared with trains in service, trash trains were less valued because painting them was less risky because the train was no longer corporately valuable. Some informants even opposed them being published: “*Well, who the fuck sends trash trains to the magazines?*”

Achieving fame is influenced by a variety of subcultural tenets that affect the ways fame is valued. A shortcut to fame by publishing too often in graffiti media was interpreted by some as selling out, superficial, and even disrespectful. The subcultural concept of *sell outs* refers to graffiti writers who have sold themselves to the institutionalized graffiti culture in hopes of publicity (Macdonald 2002, 173). Similarly, the concept of *cheap fame* mentioned in an article by Ferrell and Wiede (2010, 59) describes graffiti writers’ urge to get published on subcultural platforms. Thus, subcultural respect is subject to a higher level of regulation than fame, which is a mere form of visibility. Staying “*real*” required ambition, where graffiti was not only painted for the sake of fame but because of true passion. In this case, publishing images and developing respect required the balancing and knowledge of when publishing graffiti was in line with subcultural appreciation.

Conclusions

In the current article, I have analyzed graffiti writers’ subcultural capital and how it is created by subcultural knowledge that interacts with a zero tolerance milieu. The ethnographic material is based on notes written in Helsinki in 2011 and 2012, mainly among graffiti writers who were painting trains. Doing fieldwork as a researcher, photographer, and friend has essentially affected my understanding of the subculture and its modes of knowledge production. In ethnography, the researcher is less likely to be able to claim an objective or absolute truth, instead presenting research experiences that are real and loyal to the context in which the knowledge is discovered (Malinen 2011, 44; Pink 2001, 18–19). Ethnography is a way to bring forth the voice of those living on the margins. Hence, I have sought to bring out a piece of a reality experienced by those writers engaged in illegal graffiti and to describe their stories of zero tolerance.

The interface between the graffiti culture and graffiti subculture comprises the differences between legal and illegal forms of graffiti. The current graffiti policy in Helsinki accepts authorized graffiti as part of the city’s culture, benchmarking graffiti as middle classism because predominantly adult males are engaged in painting graffiti at the legal street art walls of the SuviLahti area (Helin 2014). Graffiti is also associated with gentrification because the legal walls are said to bring a certain level of coziness for the residents in the

recently built blocks nearby in the Kalasatama area (Helin 2014, 63). Today, graffiti may serve commercial interests instead of representing crime and disorder because it signifies trendiness and audacity in areas occupied by young, fashion-conscious, middle-class people (Helin 2014, 20; Brisman 2012; Snyder 2009, 53). However, converting subcultural capital into legitimate capital requires economic resources because massive graffiti paintings on legal walls necessitate not only time, but also a considerable amount of spray cans. Making a simpler painting requires less paint, but its subcultural value is improved by choosing a respectable object for the work, such as a train carriage. Unauthorized graffiti emerges as a form of protection against commercialism in a time when the middle-classed graffiti culture offers an alternative for those graffiti writers who have financial resources to develop legitimate capital.

When studying illicit graffiti and zero tolerance, the motives for why young or adult men are painting trains become essential. In graffiti research, subcultural respect alongside visibility and fame is often emphasized. In the current study, respect as part of a masculine construction entails subcultural knowledge and mastering the skills that prevent graffiti writers from getting caught. The intense control and criminalization of graffiti constructs powerful competitions in which graffiti writers can prove their skills and enact their subcultural status. Graffiti is carnivalized in an interplay with control through spectacle bombing among younger graffiti writers and by celebrating graffiti in the images in graffiti magazines among established writers.

Train traffic creates interactively specific forms of subcultural knowledge. This mode of subcultural knowledge was based on the conditions created by VR's zero tolerance policy. It was crucial to know exactly when, where, and how a train was placed to paint it as safely as possible and to enable the photographing of the graffiti-painted train in traffic. Graffiti writers liked to conceal subcultural knowledge and their skills regarding the painting of trains. This demonstrates the relevance of controlling subcultural knowledge, which emerges as a key for subcultural capital here. Controlling the information on how trains are painted and how train traffic works reduces train graffiti, in turn benefiting those graffiti writers who seek to master the train writing scene.

In a zero tolerance context, graffiti writers construct subcultural capital through intelligence and creative solutions, producing new modes for visibility and forming subcultural expertise through images. At the same time, subcultural visibility becomes optional while giving graffiti writers the power to design their own fame. Graffiti can be painted without anyone ever seeing it, and visibility or fame is not necessarily the core of the graffiti subculture. The balance between invisibility and visibility is part of subcultural adjustment and a way to make a difference among those who paint unauthorized graffiti in Helsinki. The publicity gained in graffiti magazines can be interpreted as a form of commercialism; thus, visibility must be sought vigilantly. It is also worth mentioning that despite the illegal content of the images that also creates subcultural capital, the sale of graffiti magazines still generates economic capital.

The commercialization of the graffiti subculture is reflected in the book *Helsinki Graffiti* (Isomursu & Jääskeläinen 1998, 41), where it is shown that graffiti experienced growth in the 1990s just before the city launched the zero tolerance project. Perhaps the arrival of zero tolerance was not particularly opposed in the graffiti subculture because commercialization may signify a withering of the subculture rather than a being a promoter of it. The advent of the Stop töhryille project formalized the criminalization of the graffiti culture; however, this harsh form of control reinforced the structures of the graffiti subculture and creations of subcultural capital. Fame as a form of visibility is not enough to explain the subcultural agency for painting graffiti in a zero tolerance milieu. Rather, subcultural capital is established in the knowledge on how graffiti is painted under strict surveillance, strengthening those graffiti writers' subcultural status.

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PUBLICATION II

Performing gendered distinctions: Young women painting illicit street art and graffiti in Helsinki

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Performing gendered distinctions: Young women painting illicit street art and graffiti in Helsinki

Malin Franbserg

Abstract:

This article studies illicit street art and graffiti subculture among women in Helsinki, taking feminist subcultural theory into account. In previous studies of illicit street art and graffiti, women's participation has been overlooked partly due to lack of data and through the tendency of seeing them as one unified marginalised group. Through ethnographic fieldwork, using edgework as the methodological approach, and interviews with eight women painting street art and graffiti in Helsinki, this article presents a critical perspective on how these women negotiate their positions in the subcultures from different positions. Particularly, it examines the performed gendered distinctions between street art and graffiti, and the negotiations of subcultural subjectivity.

Keywords: graffiti, street art, gender, subculture, distinction

Introduction

The canon of study on graffiti and street art has moved from being simply descriptive (Castleman 1982; Chalfant and Prigoff 1987) to framing a deeper analysis of subcultural youth resisting control and identity constructions (Ferrell 1996; Macdonald 2002; Snyder 2009). Moreover, the rises of sanctioned/illicit street art have expanded the understanding of contemporary graffiti, contesting both its communities, as well its boundaries and means, and therefore sometimes referred as 'post-graffiti' (Waclawek 2011). The term 'post' "suggests a chronological progression and distancing from the established visual tradition and principles of signature graffiti" (Waclawek 2011, 30). On the visual basis throughout the literacy graffiti and street art tends to be mixed, challenging both the

definitions of the subject matter studied and, therefore often the analysis of the empirical findings. It is not always clear among graffiti and street art scholars what they exactly are examining. While the definitions of the terms seems to be one subject matter in the scholarly literature of graffiti and street art (Ross 2016), there are theoretical approaches that aims to look at graffiti and street art as *an expression of a gendered identity within youth subculture* (Lombard 2013; Macdonald 2002; Monto, Machalek and Anderson 2012; Pabón 2016). Particularly, *graffiti* has been recognised as a ‘resource which young men can use to construct and validate youthful masculine identity’ (Macdonald 2016, 183). Especially, the competitive nature of graffiti as a means of recognition on the streets in the name of the ‘fame’ have often been presented as sole reason for participating in graffiti writing (Macdonald 2002; Snyder 2009; Ferrell 1996). This takes the masculine values for granted, as other motivations for participating in graffiti subcultures are set aside. Yet, in the case of *street art* there are less scholarly studies on its ‘masculine nature’, merely it has been noted to be disseminated also by a great number of women (Waclawek 2011, 30; Ganz 2007). Whether graffiti and street art should be studied as separated or mediated phenomena, the groups of women participating within these subcultures do make an interesting intersection amongst the prejudgments of who is traditionally cultivating the street cultures.

This study is part of a larger research on illicit street art and graffiti in Helsinki, which has been conducted through multiple ethnographic methods since 2011. The ethnographic fieldwork has slowly developed from observing and participating in a male-dominated scene to recognising a growing female scene in the city of Helsinki (Fransberg 2013; 2014). Through ethnographic methods, this paper studies young female graffiti and street artists in Helsinki and their experiences of graffiti writing and street art as subordinated members within a male-dominated field of arts. Particularly, it examines the performed gendered distinctions between street art and graffiti, and the negotiations of subjectivity in spheres that are typically cultivated by males. The notion of ‘performativity’ is here drawn on Judith Butler’s (1991) concept. Besides the meager studies on

gender within graffiti and street art, the focus on the female subjectivity within the often male dominated discourses within subcultures research, is also an attempt to move away from the ‘subculture vs. post-subculture’ debate and toward current understandings of what shapes the ‘subcultural subject’ (Kempson 2016, 140). The understanding of subjectivity in relation to subculture in feminist research is often done by presuming that particular social groups are either oppressed within the subcultures they interact with, and therefore pushed into the peripheries of such spaces, or that they cultivate separate spaces in order to avoid such oppression (Kempson 2016, 140 – 141). This perspective is easily understood when looking at graffiti, where women are seen as exceptions in a male-centered sphere, versus street art, where women are forming an own space in order to avoid the sexism that is typically presented in graffiti subculture. However, there are further accounts that may present structural inequality within these subcultures themselves, pointing out that these fields are usually presented as essentially ‘male’ spaces through the lens of particular knowledge paradigms that marginalises alternative experiences (Kempson 2016; Halberstam 2005). For example, what are the stylistic inequalities between the women painting graffiti and street art, and how is this negotiated? There is a problematic notion in studying graffiti and street art painting women as one united group, particularly when the two art forms often represent different rebellions and resistance, both to each other and to the world outside.

Women in studies on graffiti and street art

Graffiti originated among the youth in ethnically diverse areas of New York, Philadelphia and Chicago late 1960s when young people started writing their names (tags) in the city space and on the subways. In its early days, ‘tags’ appeared as a combination of a writers’ real name and the numerical street number, thus others knew whether the writer was female or male (Austin 2001;

Waclawek 2011, 14). Male dominance within the subculture was presented as the norm, even though also women had painted graffiti ever since the start of the movement with figures such as Barbara62, Eva62 and Lady Pink (Austin 2001; Macdonald 2002). Graffiti as a name writing culture spread to Europe and Finland which this study concerns through documentaries such as *Style Wars* and *Wild Style* in the mid-1980s. In Finland, girls' participation in graffiti subculture has been noted since 1991, as we see with the 'bombing girls' by Jaana Lähteenmaa's (1991) scholarly study on hip-hop youth culture in Helsinki, as well in popular literature 'Helsinki graffiti' which documents few girls bombing trams along with the boys (Isomursu and Jääskeläinen 1998). Piritta Malinen (2011, 96), although she found no women to interview in her pedagogical Phd-dissertation on graffiti, discusses the rarity of female graffiti writing as a reason for structural male dominance, thus girls in the movement need a particular encourage and circumstance in order to participate in graffiti painting. A recent survey of legal graffiti and street art painters at an authorised wall in Helsinki concludes that 5% (N = 186) are women (Helin 2014, 77).

Even though women are present as a minority in many studies of graffiti, scholars have focused little on gender inequalities, with only a few graffiti and street art studies that critically analyse women's participation as marginalised and subordinated agents (Macdonald 2002; 2016; Pabón 2013). Nancy Macdonald (2002) analyses the construction of masculine identities through a search for respect and fame in graffiti subculture. Her London- and New York-based ethnography is the most important analysis for 'gender regimes' (see McRobbie 2009) in graffiti subcultures, though only three women were interviewed in the study. Macdonald (2016, 233) critically points out that a female writers' contribution in the subculture is often minimised by focusing instead on their sexual activities, questioning their dedication and accountability, thus they are not seen 'authentic' enough. Kara-Jane Lombard (2013) continues Macdonald's thesis, adding that graffiti masculinity embodies the coloniser's ideals of masculinity that is dangerous, aggressive and takes risks; hence as Macdonald, she focuses on the expressions of male identity. Jessica Pabón (2013;

2016) is one of the only scholars that exceptionally focus on women's participation in graffiti. She notes the increasing number of women, both young and adults, influenced by the internet to participate in graffiti subculture. Digital/social media and internet use have established a visible presence for women and a space for female solidarity in graffiti subculture where those of the minority genders can share common experiences. Moreover, the digital and social media has increased the ways of being seen, as women among street art and graffiti do not present a unified gender but diverse identities.

Gender has been studied only a little when it comes to the case of illicit *street art*, although certain distinctions can be found on the street arts' 'gender' in relation to graffiti. Graffiti writing is often presented as more subcultural, and is predominantly (male) subcultural discourse, as the street art have been understood as more mainstream and even 'female friendly' (Ganz 2006; Macdonald 2016; Pabon 2016). Nicholas Ganz (2006, 11) writes 'In some ways the street art movement seems more open to and tolerant of women. It attracts few or none of the 'male obstacles' you associate with the graffiti movement, and women tend to be seen in a positive light and supported.' Ganz book named *Graffiti Woman* presents more than 100 artists, most of them painting actually street art and only a few graffiti. Street art does not follow the orthodox rules of graffiti: it is not restricted to letters; it uses techniques that are not traditionally used in graffiti painting, such as stencils, stickers, lamination or any kind of installation created in urban spaces without permission. Because of its communicative intension with its viewers and less cryptic message than signature graffiti, it is typically read as more social, less aggressive and therefore more 'feminine'. For example, guerrilla knit -pieces (yarn bombing) are conventionally presented as a female practice brought into a conversation with a traditionally male movement (Waclawek 2011, 72). Pabón (2016, 119) summarises the overly simplified assumptions on that women are more likely to participate in street art than in graffiti in the following ways; the juridical designation of street art as "art" versus graffiti as "vandalism" (women less likely to participate in criminal behavior), the preparation of street art

in the private domain (women inclined to be more comfortable in the safety of private sphere) and the lack of interest in ‘making masculinity’ (women not having desire to exercise masculine behaviors).

Despite the representative differences between street art and graffiti, some scholars contest the two have been ‘arbitrarily separated’ through governmentality (Leslie and Hunt 2013; McAuliffe 2012) and by urban policy language ‘as it reflects the commodification of street culture and the selective appropriation of graffiti into mainstream art systems’ (Georgiou 2013, 160). However, the potential danger in dividing these two art forms has its risks; one may study “good” street art, vs. “bad” graffiti (Ross, et. al. 2017, 416), a typical discourse also in public domains. Yet, it is the common features shared by street art and graffiti that makes it interesting to analyse young women's participation within these two discourses, not as a unified group but as actors that implement the distinction between street art and graffiti. Both art forms tend to be unauthorised, the illegality being a driving force for its practioners, and both are impelled alter the public space. Thus, they both tend to question the notion of public space and especially, *who* is cultivating the streets. Further, in contrast to other subcultural groupings, graffiti and street art are largely disembodied, as the physical person behind the art remains absent from the present (Hannerz 2017). The performative body is mostly invisible, but it is still likely to be drawn on normative notions of the male body, both inside the subcultures, as outside the subcultures.

Researcher positionality: the field, edgework and methods

As part of a larger research in graffiti and street art subculture in Helsinki, this article presents the first foray to the women’s field in the city. It further presents a specific shift from women being isolated subjects in graffiti and street art scenes to the radical change of a growing

number of female painters' in Helsinki. The visibility of women in graffiti and street art was practically non-existent for outsiders until the first authorised street art walls appeared after the end of the municipal led zero tolerance against graffiti and street art in 2008¹. This is not to say that there were no women in the field before this, but their visibility was largely disembodied also inside the subculture. As Hannerz (2017, 374) notes, the disembodiment and the absence of the performative body have been deepened as an effect of zero tolerance, and as a consequence most artists were largely unaware of each other. A further suggestion here is that its effect deepened the male dominance, as women were widely isolated from each other as a result of the subcultures' 'male' assumption. The legal walls enabled the visibility and meeting of diverse bodies that had remained invisible during zero tolerance and Katri² was one of the first graffiti writing women I ever met in Helsinki at one of the legal walls. She was a typical street bomber with her rude and fearless attitude. Before her, I had been largely unaware of other women in the field, even if graffiti subculture has maintained a central role in my sense of identity, tastes and social life since the age of 14. After Katri, I have gradually met more than 30 young women painting street art and/or graffiti in the ethnographic terrain in Helsinki, mostly by drifting around among graffiti and street artists but also through municipal led youth work³. This allowed me to explore the somewhat different distinctions between the 'underground' and 'legal' or semi-legal scenes in Helsinki.

¹ Helsinki experienced significant change in its policy against graffiti and street art, shifting from a strict zero tolerance policy (1998–2008) to celebrating urban arts, which are now consumed through different institutions and municipal-led youth work. The "Stop graffiti" –project (1998 – 2008) was led by the municipal Urban Environment Division, the state owned train company 'VR' and private security companies, such as 'Finnish Protection Service' (FPS). Similar to other Nordic countries, the zero tolerance policy was built on the belief of that legal graffiti and street art will work as a gateway to illegal art and vandalism, and eventually more serious crime among the youth (Høigård 2007; Kimwall 2014; Koskela 2009). Since the policy change in 2008 the Youth Department of Helsinki has actively developed youth work focusing on graffiti and street art through authorised walls, workshops and online-work. Moreover, the growing number of graffiti and street art exhibitions in the city's galleries have somewhat confirmed the popularisation and commodification of the art forms. The assumed intersections of the subcultural subject has therefore changed from being a troubled white working-class youth male to new representations, such as the seniors' 'K65-crew', or female-only projects like 'Mimmit peintaa'.

² All names of the participants are anonymised.

³ In autumn 2013, I was teaching a graffiti workshop for young women, authorised by the municipal Youth Department. Together with a group of young women in age 17 – 29, we met weekly during three months at

From these communities, I eventually approached eight individuals to participate in-depth interviews, on the basis that they all painted illicitly and thus were fostering a more ‘subcultural’ identity. The sample is mixed consisting of both street artists and graffiti writers who were found from the informal networks maintained by traditional field research and the youth work. The empirical data in this text draws mainly from these ethnographic interviews and field notes that I conducted with the eight women over six months, from June to December 2014. During the field observation, participants Satu, Minna, Leena, Laura, Katri, Tiina, Emmi and Ines were between 19 – 30 years, most of them between 25 – 29. During the six months period, I taped one in-depth interview with each of the women, ranging from 60 – 150 minutes. The interviews were loosely structured, based on researchers’ insights of the field and on information that had been collected through ethnographic field notes from these and other study participants.

The group of women studied here, are white, heterosexual and working class, although they were developing a certain cultural capital through their labour market participation and education. In a similar manner to Tarja Tolonen’s (2013) study of Finnish middle-class ‘Theatre Girls’, these women were artistic and performing certain middle-class values in their style and appearance. Moreover, during the interview and observation period, six of the women were working or studying in a field that required handicraft and artistic perspective. Their designation as ‘working class’ stems from their educational background: most of these women had or were completing a degree from vocational school, an alternative to a high school degree that enables youth in Finland to attend university. They were not typically academic; although two of them had been enrolled in a lower university degree and a third woman had completed one. Two of the women had short-term

authorised street art walls, equipped with spray cans fund by the Youth Department. At the walls we would teach each other different painting techniques, ‘hung out’, share gossips from the scene and discuss the plans for the weekend. During the workshops I noted that only few girls were interested in doing ‘traditional’ graffiti among the mostly street art –oriented group, something that my boss was even ‘worried’ about as he urged me to get ‘the girls to do more graffiti’, something that I noted was difficult to do since they simply did not show interest.

contract work and non-permanent employment, and one was on maternity leave from a vocational school. Thus, their class was not a fixed; rather it displays their positions as transformations to adulthood. Another indicator of the mix between working-class and middle-class values was that they were able to move, to some extent, elegantly between these domains. For instance, we could attend an exclusive night club, but brought our own beer cans from which we would fill up our glasses under the tables, instead of buying expensive drinks. Some of the women knew how to shoplift expensive shoes or jackets, while many of us dodged fares on the local public transport system. Although many of the women adapted various skills in managing economic deprivation in favour of 'living up to middle-class standards', I must state that not all of the women in this study used typically 'deviant' behaviour to achieve this. They were instead working and studying hard to reach their personal goals in a conventional society.

Ethnographic research has been shown to be an appropriate method for understanding graffiti and street art (Ferrell 1996; Macdonald 2002; Snyder 2009). It enables 'thick' descriptions of subcultures and the nuances inside them. The most important outcome in this method is building trust with participants through the researchers' engagement with the field, often through the own immersion into it. In particular, the ethics of ethnography is to ensure the anonymisation of participants, especially because of their sensitive information of criminal acts. I have drawn particularly upon ethnographic fieldwork on the notion of edgework (Lyng 1990). Stephen Lyng (1990) describes edgework as behaviour where one seeks to go voluntarily beyond the 'edge' of safety or the law, demonstrating how an individual can develop 'self-determination' and 'confidence'. Ethnographic edgework certainly contributes to studies of illicit graffiti and street art practice. Cultural criminologists (Ferrell and Hamm 1998) affirm edgework as a methodology to understand subcultural membership, as edge and adrenaline are shown to coexist. However, edgework has been criticised as a gendered concept, taking male performance for granted in its theoretical discussion of voluntary risk-taking behaviour (Lois 2003, Gailey 2009, Newmahr 2011).

Shane Blackman (2016, 72) suggests, referring to Jennifer Lois (2003, 181), that in order to counter edgework's gender bias and masculine middle-class preoccupation with leisured risk and being 'emotionally cool', fieldwork politics should understand emotions as something constructive and meaningful. Blackman's (2016) 'emotional edgework' may enhance the understanding of fieldwork, where one both researches and participates in a subculture among friends.

Some research participants became close friends to me and I became emotionally attached to them, which has subsequently affected my interpretation of the data. Moreover, the most difficult task has been to understand the effects of that I initially searched for graffiti writing women, but found out that actually many women refused to be defined as graffiti writers, but as street artists. My prior field research of the male-dominated field of train graffiti writers in Helsinki (2011 – 2013) has somewhat confirmed my mobility and access to the subcultural scene. Train writers often are positioned as the 'inner circle' of the graffiti subculture, which might also challenge a feminist position researching women on the periphery. Some of my research participants knew about my subcultural background, the field research among train writers and all knew my role as a teacher in the municipal-led youth workshop. Taking all this into account, the differences in status and power between the researcher and the researched, is a critical claim legitimated by feminist scholars (Madison 2005). Even with 'gender match' with research participants, age, ethnicity and educational background could create substantial barriers. My own role was complicated both through my possession of subcultural knowledge as an 'insider researcher' (Hodkinson 2005, 138 - 139) and as an academic among marginalised subcultural subjects. I sometimes noted my different subcultural position when research participants would ask for advice on techniques for painting 'hot spots' or trains, which put me in an ethical dilemma as a youth worker but also as a friend, who positions subcultural knowledge. On the other hand, the ability to share subcultural gossip, anecdotes and observations with participants may enhance interview conversations, creating a two-way exchange instead of the usual question-and-answer form (Hodkinson 2005, 139). This offers

substantial advantages in terms of trust between the research participants and researcher, in particular where the aim is to build feminist accounts.

Gendered distinctions between street art and graffiti

During the years of field research in Helsinki, I often heard when male graffiti writers encouraged their girlfriends to paint with them: “*You can do a character next to my piece*” was a typical comment that underpinned the assistive female role in graffiti subculture and its relation to street art. Rarely did I hear a male encourage a female friend to make an entire graffiti piece herself. Characters (fictive figures, animals, popular cartoon, etc.) next to graffiti pieces were positively commented amongst graffiti and street artists in Helsinki, but their function was often shaped as a supportive assemble of the graffiti piece itself, placing the tag name in centrum. Wacławek (2011, 39, 41) argues that street artists have detached the character from the graffiti subculture and eventually developed a distinctive art form, thus “it owes much to the original culture of graffiti writing, which paved the way for the creation of unsanctioned art in the city”. This stance should be critically looked up-on as it takes street art automatically as subordinated to graffiti and underpins the marginalisation of street art and its knowledge production in subculture.

In this study on the visual basis, four of the women were mostly painting street art and four mostly graffiti. The women identified as ‘street artist’ made different kinds of characters, stencils, posters or stickers, although the main tool for them all was spray paint. Some of them would often paint together with other graffiti writers, as an incorporated part of bigger graffiti murals, others alone on the streets. Street art and graffiti in Helsinki as two distinctive arts’ was identified by aesthetical basis, but also throughout the distinctions the women proposed in the interviews, where graffiti was illustrated as fixed and street art something *else*:

”I’m more like a street artist because graffiti is graffiti and it’s annoying when somebody says that ‘oh, that sun on the wall, it’s graffiti’, that’s just so dumb. So maybe I’m like, well street artist is a better word for that. I don’t think I’m, well it’s hard to name yourself into one style.” – Laura, 25⁴

“Maybe I’m more like a street artist because I’m not doing (graffiti) pieces that often. I’m more trying to do a thing that would be more like my own style. But, everyone can put me in any box they want, graffiti or street-art, something between. Both are interesting for me.” – Ines, 19

Laura and Ines refused to be fully fixed into one of the ‘boxes’, although both recognised they were ‘more like a street artist’ and that it was important to picture the differences between the two. The understanding of separate spaces does not prevent from identifying with both arts simultaneously, as subcultures often overlap each other or share common spaces. To pinpoint the differences was a way to mark one’s capacity of subcultural knowledge, as ‘outsiders’ did not always see the differences. Moreover, the street art discourse was much more flexible in its ‘style’, and as both Laura and Ines point out that rather in naming oneself into one style, the aim was to do an ‘own’ underived style, distinctive to others in the scene. In opposition to street art, graffiti was both by street artists and graffiti writers more strictly defined: it was simply based on writing your tag name. The women identified as ‘graffiti writers’ were writing typical signature graffiti: ‘tags’, ‘throw-ups’ or painted ‘pieces’ based on stylistic letters. Moreover, all graffiti writers were more explicit in that their style was graffiti, compared to the street artists who were more flexible in their self-definition. Especially, graffiti writers would pinpoint that they were *not* interested in street art, but *graffiti*:

“I’m not into street art, because I don’t think it, or my perception of graffiti is that it’s based on letters. And characters also, they’re also something else. So I think graffiti is letters and in certain spaces and characters is that street arty thing, which I think is different and that I’m not interested in.” – Leena, 28 (graffiti writer)

In short, as the street artists, graffiti writers ensured that street art was defined as something diffuse: ‘something else’, ‘different’ and ‘not like’ graffiti. Thus, street art was described as something different from the norm (graffiti) and became an object of ‘othering’. Graffiti was even clarified as

⁴ Interviews done in Finnish and translated into English.

something 'pure' in opposite to street art: '...she wasn't painting pure graffiti either, but did all kinds of weird street art shit.' (Tiina, 25). Tiina was one of the women that I met on legal walls in Helsinki. While at the legal walls, she was usually painting traditionally graffiti pieces and I was impressed about her creative ideas on the letters' structures. When I asked her to participate in the research, I was surprised when she replied: 'Sure but I don't know much about graffiti, but a lot about street art.' I found out that Tiina was an experienced street artist and had a lot to say about the inequalities between the two art scenes. As the intention was to find out how women negotiate their subjectivity in male dominated subcultures, she pointed out a distinct sense in my own way of talking from a *graffiti* perspective:

Well, if you're talking about how women and men, or like how women feel they are in graffiti circles, but then it's another thing how street artists feel they are with graffiti writers. They're in some way really inferior, I've noticed. It's like, well if you're putting up some stickers, then it's like not real claim of the public space, but something like... Or even if you do big posters, that also feel like graffiti writers are not appreciating it, like when you're doing it with aerosol. So at some point I felt it was a bit weird, it felt like there was some beef between these groups.

As this interview data marks the distinctions between street art and graffiti, it also raises the importance for researchers to detect a subcultural sensibility that recognises the varying subjects within a context that positions them differently in subcultures structures. Moreover, the (re)production of the dominant knowledge paradigms placed graffiti in center, subverting street art. Thus, the picturing of women among street art and graffiti as a relatively unified movement in Helsinki became difficult, as the women negotiated their subjectivity from different locations often based on the structures between street art/graffiti, but also between licit/illicit and invisible/visible.

It's ok to do street art, but graffiti...

Several accounts among the interviewees displayed distinctions between street art as ‘less harmful’ (licit) and graffiti as more ‘criminal’ (illicit), something that is confirmed by many street art and graffiti studies (Ross 2016). Street art was understood as less serious crime because of the assumptions of being less risky and easily removable, even though some of the street artists revealed multiple techniques of how to maintain your art piece on the surface as long as possible, something that the graffiti writers rarely discussed. Also, the ‘street artists’ were more likely to be understood as part of the ‘legal’ scenes of Helsinki, because they were more active in the authorised female-only workshops. Yet, the female-only workshops enabled a ‘safe space’ for the women to paint, without receiving physical or verbal abuse from the males in the scene, something that was accounted by many of the women participating in the research. Many of the interviewees explained that these workshops functioned as a meeting place for likeminded and a space where ‘you can do your thing’ without being sexually objectified by males in the subculture. These spaces can be understood as feminist means to resist the sexism women faced in the subcultural groupings. However, the authorised youth projects or self-organised legal projects were not perceived as authentic enough among the more subcultural graffiti writers. Especially, the more illicitly oriented women disclaimed the ‘accountability’ of such ‘girls’ and expressed a distaste towards the contemporary politics that tends to popularise graffiti and street art, pointing to a nostalgic notion of the zero tolerance past:

It has just been turned into this trendy thing and I think it’s ridiculous. The scene did graffiti before exactly because it wasn’t [legal], and because it was something that you’re not allowed to do. Maybe this [legalisation] will bring some more chicks into the culture. – Satu, 30 (graffiti writer)

‘Maybe this will bring some more chicks into the culture’ was said ironically, accompanied by an explanation that legal painters taught by the youth projects were not ‘real’ or authentic enough. Similarly, other interviewees noted that women who learn to paint in youth projects have to prove their commitment to the subculture much longer than a painter who was self-taught. ‘They just

don't really know what's really up', said Katri, noting that subcultural knowledge is only gained through 'real' practice. This lack of solidarity among women in male dominated subcultures has been acknowledged by many previous subcultural studies and is considered an effect of fear of exclusion or being sexualised by the peer group (Leblanc 2006, Lumsden 2010). This 'emphasized femininity' supports the male hegemony of the subculture that re-internalises the gender norms in subculture (Connell 1987, Leblanc 2005, 32), and moreover problematises the understandings of feminist alternative spaces, here the female-only workshops, as being immune to oppressive discourses (Kempson 2016).

The attributes of graffiti, taking risks and being 'criminal', have typically been constructed as masculine (Macdonald 2016, Monto, Machale and Anderson 2012). Failure to perform these standards consequently labelled street art doings as feminine, as street art did not cause big removal costs and it was possible to prepare in private domains, thus it was interpreted as something for 'pussies' by one of the street artists. Even the street art presents a certain rebellion against the orthodox rules of graffiti and breaks down its conventions; it is effectively silenced through the discourses of being less risky. During the field research it became evident that these understandings were much depended on the formations of the dominant discourses and encounters with 'outsiders'. Tiina explains that she never had any troubles with authorities during illicit street art actions:

No, not really, I've been pretty lucky. Some disputes from random by passers, but nothing special. Usually they're just commenting positively or something like that, even I've been in the middle of the night doing some bigger posters in downtown, and well sometimes the dog-walkers see me doing... Then when they really see what I'm doing, they leave me in peace, they'll just stare and wonder for a while but never calls the police or something like that, which is a bit peculiar.

What makes Tiina's account interesting is that she actually did street art in a highly visible and public place, claiming a space in city center, but her doings was permitted by the audience. This illustrates how street art may be defined culturally 'licit' even if placed in public space without

permission, as citizens do not report or request it. Therefore, the sense of risk is concerned by how likely one will get caught and on which basis (Chackal 2016, 362). In opposite to Tiina, Emmi (graffiti writer) describes how she was caught by plain-clothed guards with a friend in an old train tunnel that was abandon and no longer in public use, but popularly used by graffiti writers. The ‘operation’ by the plain-clothed guards was militaristically organised as ‘four men against two girls’ trapped both ends of the tunnel. The guards had been lurking in the middle of the tunnel for graffiti writers before Emmi and her friend even started to paint. After half an hour, the guards surrounded them in the tunnel and called the police to arrest them for vandalism. One of the guards was a ‘well-known’ guard within the graffiti scene in Helsinki:

Yeah, he was really pissed off. And then there were some fairly young [guards] really in a good mood like ‘hey [tag name]! I have written a criminal report on you!’ And then what else, oh yeah, then they were joking around about we should start to do some guerrilla knitting. They said they wanted to order jumpers from us, like FPS jumpers, where it says ‘Fuck FPS’ on the back... [...] Yeah, they told us that they had never caught chicks without their lads before.

FPS stands for ‘Finnish Protection Service’, a former security company that specialised in graffiti prevention. The company does not exist anymore, but the initials are extensively used by both graffiti writers and security guards themselves to signify a specialised graffiti task force.

Messerschmidt’s (1993) study of crime and masculinities provides a theory of where police work constructs masculinity in a game on behalf of another. Likewise, Macdonald (2002, 119) notes the relationship between male graffiti writers and the ‘vandal squad’⁵ as distinctive, differing from their relation to other ‘outsiders’ of the subculture. In this distinctive relationship, authorities like the police and security guards see their combat with graffiti writers as a ritualised game and an enjoyable challenge in the struggle for control (Macdonald 2002, 119). Although there is a struggle for control of space such as a train yard or a street, according to Macdonald (2002, 119–121, 124),

⁵ ‘Vandal squad’, originally a unit of New York City Transit Police Department, is often used in the ‘graffiti world’ as a term to refer to authoritative graffiti task forces.

the relationship is based on a certain mutual respect among the players of the game, where ‘the best man may win’ in this battle of masculinities. The question here is whether a woman’s body may participate respectfully in this battle of masculinities, and moreover with different styles, such as street art. In the context of a subculture avoiding control but also intrigued by the faced risks, the painting body aims to stay invisible, and is then often assumed as ‘male’. When these hidden bodies become visible and break the normative assumptions of male bodies, they are femininised in order to fall in line with gender binary. As gender is understood socially constructed, it is done so through performativity (Butler 1990; Halberstam 1998). While Jack Halberstam (1998) demonstrates a more nuanced understanding of gender categories, it is only when these hidden ‘female masculinities’ are caught in their action and in a certain style, that they become visible and recognised as part of the subcultural battle.

Avoiding the fame game

Scholars point out that respect, fame and recognition in the subculture, ‘claiming a name’ on the streets, are the most prominent reasons for painting graffiti and the resources for constructing an identity in the subculture (Ferrell 1996; Macdonald 2002; Snyder 2009). The assumed performative game of the fame and the subsequent fabrication of a matching subcultural career and achieving the status of ‘king’ (Campos 2012) marginalises different subcultural performativities, were subjects oppose dominant understandings. The subcultural visibility was downplayed by the women, because it was often understood through a ‘male’ gaze. The relationship to fame for the both graffiti writing and street artist women in Helsinki was somewhat contradictory, as it did not reflect explicitly their motivations or values of the subculture. Only two of the graffiti writing women confessed that fame would be one reason among others for them to paint, rest of the both street

artists and graffiti writers stating that it 'was not a thing for them'. Moreover, in the case of street art it is even more complicated, as the 'signature' is not the focus of street art doings and therefore gaining a 'name' on streets is depended on the recognition of a certain characteristics or style.

Yes, I think it's because of this fame thing, that boys have accepted the idea of graffiti, the fame and getting name recognition so they'll put more effort on that. But for girls, that fame is not so meaningful and that's why they can release themselves from all that inbready graffiti thing and they'll just really wanna do that for themselves. I dunno, I think this is why I'm not into letters. – Minna, 29 years old (street artist)

I don't have that kind of a personal relationship with fame. Of course, you can't deny that if you're writing graffiti, of course you want somebody to see that. But it's not why I'm doing it, it's more about the experience with the people I hung out with and that dimension where I can live every day without the need to be adjusted into the society that don't represent me. So, I don't need to advertise myself, that's more like distressing. – Leena, 28 years old (graffiti writer)

As the attempt to gain fame seems to be set as a subcultural norm from a male perspective, these women refused to be part of the 'fame game'. Fame becomes hard to define as politics of a personal matter, when it is firstly evaluated through the structures of gender. Instead, these women present meanings that can be situated in individualism and self-hood where they do art because of themselves, and not because of being recognised by the structures of the subcultures.

Emmi was one of the two graffiti writers that admitted that fame did have a meaning for her. I became to know Emmi through the female-only youth workshop, were she was one of the few girls who would be interested in doing graffiti among the street art -oriented group. Her pieces and tags were not only seen on legal walls, but along the railway lines, thus she was performing and living up to somewhat conventional graffiti writers' subcultural standards, claiming a name in the city space. Although she was generally seen as a positive exception in the street art -oriented group, I was asked by my boss to urge Emmi to use another name during the workshops, as it was improper to use the 'illegal' tag name in a municipal led youth work. Thus, she was pretty 'known'. When asking about fame, Emmi admits it is desirable, but explains that she does not want to earn it through the lens of gender:

Maybe, but then again... sometimes I wanna change my tag name, because everyone knows me already. (...) That's why I think it would be good to have it in secret, so that nobody would know who does what. It would only be the tag name that people know, that would be much cooler. That kind of fame I would like to have, but not like 'that *chick* does that'.

Macdonald (2002, 137) writes that it can be easy for a woman to become well-known because of her gender is an exception in the subculture. While this might at first look like an advantage, it means that women are sometimes seen as gaining 'easy fame' and as a result fame becomes less meaningful. Pabón (2016, 81) notes that choosing 'gender anonymity' by using a gender neutral/androgynous tag name allows graffiti writers and street artists communicate a message and exercise their artistry without the stigma associated with their gender in everyday life.

Subsequently, according to Pabón the decision regarding gender visibility or invisibility affects graffiti writing women more than street artists because the tag name is a central component of the work for the former, which may construct street art as more 'female friendly' (Pabón 2016, 81).

Macdonald (2016, 235) writes, that less emphasis on fame and name recognition amongst often unnamed street artists may widen the creative boundaries and opportunities to perform and explore femininities in the subculture. Signature graffiti is essentially an affirmation of self within a network of initiates, when street art, generally communicates a variety of ideas (Waclawek 2011, 123). The consequence of avoiding fame through a gender lens and emphasizing gender anonymity was however, that the tagging body was read as 'males' within the subculture:

Satu: I think that if people would know what the chicks are really doing, they would be respected much more, because there are a lot of more hardcore girls than the average guys are. But I think chicks just don't make a noise of themselves.
M: They don't make much noise of themselves?
S: No. They don't need to be like that, they're not raising that fame, it's not like they're goal in a same way.

When the fame as a collective response for why to do graffiti and street art has been pointed out by scholars, it has been done so through a perspective of masculine values. These women emphasised more individual responses, placing themselves outside the fame discourse. Moreover, as street

artists proposed a total refusal of the fame game, graffiti writers' criticised the gender based judgements of the fame. Thus, there is a need for researchers to, as Kempson (2016, 148) writes, be wary of flattening internal hierarchies within the subcultural spaces by presuming that the participants all share same values, and further that all have equal access to the resources that constitute the normative subject within a subculture.

Conclusion

The diversity of women seems to be neglected within the graffiti and street art studies, often scattered in to the "girlfriend" or the passive "look out" role (Macdonald 2001). The women I followed in Helsinki shows that women perform various and diverse styles within these overlapping subcultural groupings, making them hard to present as one united group. The women typically positioned themselves in relation to the somewhat opposite discourses of graffiti and street art, but even inside these there were multiple performing's of subcultural identities.

Street art should not be understood as essentially a 'female version' of graffiti, rather it provides opportunities to reclaim the multi-gendered spaces of the streets through different styles than graffiti. Because street art is presented as the gentle, non-threatening alternative to graffiti, both by dominant and subcultural discourses, it functions as a space where women and/or marginal subjects are easily identified and recognised in street subcultures, where they cultivate a distinct and isolate feminist subculture with a distance from the 'masculine' graffiti subculture. While street art may not present a revolutionary change in graffiti's gender regimes, street artists do present a shift in the dominant paradigms of cultural productions in urban spaces, that is not only directed and dedicated to the graffiti's 'outlaw masculinity' (Monto, Machalek and Anderson 2012). As the graffiti subculture's masculinist standards make it very difficult for women to be fully recognised,

street art has somewhat offered a space for the neoliberal projects of feminist ‘selves’ (see Gonick 2006) in these spheres. The designation ‘street art’ may represent the ‘girl power’ –movement or a form of ‘riot grrls’ within male dominated street subcultures, yet as a ‘less’ harmful feminism for graffiti as it is in subcultural settings rarely recognized as part of graffiti and therefore not threatening its granted masculine ideals.

Graffiti subculture equips writers with structure and collegial encouragement, but also offers roles that foster discipline and models of behavior (Waclawek 2011, 55). Especially, the hierarchical relationship between ‘kings’ (and ‘queens’), the more established and experienced, and ‘toys’, the novice and less competent graffiti writer is well documented in many graffiti studies, but this structure remains unexplored among and between women, and in particularly in street art studies. Instead, there seems to be a structure between graffiti and street art, placing the former as superior over the latter in terms of subcultural accountability. Moreover, the tendency to see street art as more legal and less harmful ways of communicate within city space, makes it conventionally more ‘proper’ for women, re-establishing the traditional attributes of femininity. Graffiti remains as the masculinist identity project, in which only rare women are part of, and if so, often violently sexually controlled by her male peers (Macdonald 2002). Further, because of street arts’ lucrative markets for art museums and selling works, it is more than welcomed for the middle class values of ‘urban creativity’ and metropolitan agencies (Merrill 2015).

This study demonstrates how women in street art and graffiti shape different identities, based on different distinctive understandings of ideals, practices and motivations in the two subcultural settings. It is therefore not adequate to study women in street art and graffiti as one *united* group, as they negotiate their structural positions and subvert and negotiate gender regimes through different strategies, and from different locations. The feminist analysis in studies of street art and graffiti are thus obligated to lean on epistemologies that recognizes the structural

inequalities between subcultures themselves, displaying an intersectional understanding of marginal positions in street subcultures.

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PUBLICATION III

**Spotting Trains: An ethnography of subcultural media practices among
graffiti writers in Helsinki**

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SPOTTING TRAINS:



Figure 1. Graffiti panels on a commuter train spotted at Käpylä station. Helsinki, Finland, 2018. Photograph ©Malin Fransberg.

AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF SUBCULTURAL MEDIA PRACTICES AMONG GRAFFITI WRITERS IN HELSINKI

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This research article examines the subcultural media practices among a group of male graffiti writers in the city of Helsinki, Finland. It builds on Jeff Ferrell and Robert Weide's 'spot theory' and focuses on letter-based graffiti writing on trains. The object of this study is to articulate how local graffiti writers, who take part in the city's spatial subcultural play, use subcultural media for the purpose of 'spotting' and boundary making. It concludes that seeking respect and prestige in the local community is not always achieved by way of acquiring visibility or 'fame', or through the proliferate circulation of graffiti painted trains on different media channels. The article is based on the findings of a long-term ethnographic fieldwork project (2011–2018) carried out in Helsinki.

INTRODUCTION

At 6 AM, it was still dark and freezing. So, we were waiting at the station; the train was supposed to arrive in ten minutes. The guys looked tired and serious; they were dressed in black and sported hoodies. They were looking at the ground, avoiding the CCTVs. I did the same. The train arrived. 'Fuck, it's the wrong train!', one of the guys responded, and I saw nothing on the train. 'Let's check if it's the other train; can you see the [graffiti] pieces on the other side?' The guys stretched their necks, looking through the windows, but it was dark and, at least, I couldn't see anything 'on the other side'. 'Was it that one? Fuck it wasn't!' 'I couldn't see anything.' 'Did it have three carriages?' 'Did you see if the first two wagons had waves on its side?' 'Yeah, it wasn't that one for sure.' 'Fuck if they'd pulled it out of service.' 'Don't think so, they wouldn't have time. For sure that's the one they took out from the yard, that's the one that leaves first.' The guys had reckoned it wrong. I said nothing, just followed them out from the station. 'Next one [train] will be in 20 minutes.' (Fieldnote, 2012)¹

This fieldnote was written after a fieldwork trip with a group of male graffiti writers in Helsinki, Finland. The night before, two different commuter trains standing at a station had been painted, and we were supposed to 'spot' these trains in traffic as part of the post-spray painting ritual of documenting the short-lived graffiti while in circulation. It is simply deemed cool to have a photo made in traffic. This essentially meant taking photographs in some place at a station or along the track that offered enough of a view to 'catch' the passing trains. It was crucial for the writers to spot these trains because none of them had proper photographs of their pieces. They had painted in a narrow aisle between the trains in the darkness of night, and in those hours, producing a satisfactory photo of their graffiti pieces was apparently challenging. It was also important to catch these trains during the morning's first rush hour as graffiti covered trains are taken out and sent into the 'buff'² after only a single round of service due to the zero tolerance³ policy employed by the Finnish railway company VR.

In this article, I apply a methodology I call 'spotting trains', influenced by Jeff Ferrell and Robert Weide's (2010) spatial analysis called 'spot theory'. Spotting trains reflects both the creation of visual documentation as well as the physical movement, i.e. The writer's chase of the train in its movement (see Figure 1). The documentation and the chasing of the train are a form of subcultural play and demonstrate graffiti writers' sense of the local subcultural idioms and the specific landscape of train writing in 'the cities in the city' that alter the dominant approach to the legislated city (Young, 2014). The preconditions set by the spatial dimensions in the city's train system, the policy of the train company, and the subcultural value of getting a train photographed in traffic all contribute to the graffiti writers' specialist knowledge of the circulating trains. Thus the 'spotting' is not only a subcultural skill for selecting an appropriate 'spot' for graffiti writing (Ferrell & Weide, 2010: 49), but a further engagement with the spot by regularly extending its spatial dimension through pictorial representations. Spotting therefore becomes a powerful source to mediate, transform, and promulgate subcultural spots that physically appear as temporary and ephemeral, often as a result of control policies, most notably the zero

tolerance policy under which graffiti is quickly removed from urban space.

This article is at the theoretical intersection of subcultural theory and cultural criminology, and addresses their overlapping interest in the making and the control of subcultural and mediated urban spaces. The resulting interdisciplinarity occupies a field which seeks to extend the boundaries of spatial knowledge employed in subcultural meaning and value making. Subcultural theory engages the exploration of contested meanings with regard to deviation from, or resistance to the conventional and the dominant, often referred to as the mainstream (Hannerz, 2016: 52; Thornton, 1995); yet, it also shapes the structural significance of the 'subcultural subject', while recording the rhetoric of social privilege and hierarchy within certain spatial contexts (Blackman & Kempson, 2016: 10; Jensen, 2018). While subcultural theory has a long history and has developed as a dialectic of differing paradigmatic schools, cultural criminology is a fairly new subfield. Established partly as a critique on positivistic criminology, situational crime prevention, crime mapping and, moreover, the broken window model of zero tolerance, cultural criminology has come to participate in the alternative ways of interpreting the relationship between space and crime by recognising cultural and mediated dimensions often overlooked by these simplistic methods of crime control (Hayward, 2012: 441; 2009).

This research article embraces urban fieldwork and notions of edge ethnography used in cultural criminology (Ferrell & Hamm, 1998). Ethnographic research in cultural criminology is profoundly engaged in situated dynamics, emotions, and meaning in everyday life within particular (sub)cultural milieus (Ferrell, 1999: 399). Conducting ethnography in illicit subcultures often requires researchers' participation and deep immersion in order to produce a multifaceted knowledge of the studied field. Being in such a position, the researcher becomes a part of the generated research knowledge and, as such, requires at least a partial understanding of one's own positionality within the field. Blackman and Kempson (2016: 10) stated that 'this realisation requires the development of innovative methodologies that are equipped to offer multiperspective views on researcher/participant relations, and on the process of identifying which findings are 'significant''. Methodologies of both cultural criminology and subcultural studies often combine urban ethnographic participatory observation with media content analysis, using research particularly at the intersection of media, crime control, and subcultures (Ferrell, 1999: 400; Hayward, 2009; Thornton, 1995). It is here that urban ethnography is able to find a context that imposes creativity, transgression, and collective solutions among members in subcultures controlled by a city's policy. Furthermore, ethnography is a research design whereby the research questions often emerge as the methodological practice goes along. It was precisely by participating in graffiti writers' photographing practices, 'spotting trains', that I became interested in how graffiti writers publish train graffiti and how they use different subcultural media for the benefit of their own train writing missions. Thus, this article addresses some of the subcultural publishing logics with regard to visibility and the way in which visibility is involved in boundary making inside the graffiti subculture, focusing on those claiming ownership of an itemised subcultural landscape, or more specifically, ownership of particular spots for train writing.

This research article stems from a long-term ethnographic research project conducted in Helsinki (2011–2019). I have applied multiple sets of different participatory observation methods for different graffiti writers and street artist groups, including participant interviews and the analysis of different graffiti-focused micromedia. In this article, I address the subcultural media practices of a distinct all-male group of graffiti writers in Helsinki engaged in the practice of train writing. Train writing can be defined as a genre of graffiti subculture dedicated to spray painting passenger trains, freight trains, and subway carriages, and is based on both the classical letter style and the practice of name writing in public space. With reference to its historical roots in the New York graffiti youth culture that emerged in the late 1960s, train writing is often presented as the fundamental act of graffiti subculture (Austin, 2001; Stewart, 2009), which is known for such concepts as manliness, being 'real', and striving for hegemony within the scene (Macdonald, 2002).

The first intensive observation period in this rather loosely organised community of graffiti writers started in August 2011 and lasted until February 2013. Subsequently, I kept following some of the members of this group and finally conducted six in-depth interviews in 2018–2019. These taped interviews varied from one to three hours and were semi-structured by themes, such as 'graffiti and media', 'zero tolerance policies', 'Helsinki graffiti', and 'gender in graffiti'. The analysis of this article focuses on the themes that arose as significant in the process of spotting trains and in relation to the media practices among these graffiti writers. The analysis is based on fieldnotes and the thematic interviews, as well as local graffiti magazines, books, and online digital media that deal with graffiti in Finland. Before moving on to the ethnography of this article, I will first outline the concept of an ecology of spots by revisiting Ferrell and Weide's idea of spot theory.

THE ECOLOGY OF SPOTS

Ferrell and Weide's (2010) 'spot theory' maps graffiti writers' conceptions of spatiality in the city and the ways they choose significant spots in which to paint. As a starting point, they argue that the collective motivation for spot selection is recognition and prominence among other writers and city residents, and as such, each act of graffiti writing involves a trade-off between the factors of visibility, location, and risk. Ferrell and Weide (2010: 51) maintain that graffiti writers seek an audience in order to increase their subcultural status and acquire *fame*, which is a widely accepted idea in the research of the graffiti subculture (Bloch, 2019; Castleman, 1984; Lachmann, 1988; Macdonald, 2002; MacDowall, 2019; Snyder, 2009). Fame refers to the graffiti subcultures' own prestige economy of 'getting up' and the labour involved in maintaining a presence in a city's spatial dimensions. Austin (2001: 40–43) stated that fame, in the early 1960s writing culture of New York, was an alternative route for poor, racialised youth to exist and to manufacture a name in the city's complex economy. Other previous studies on graffiti subculture have constructed the fame game as an alternative, deviant career path; a social ladder that has been described on the basis of a number of similar overarching distinctions: *toy to king* (Castleman, 1984: 77), *toy to muralist* (Lachmann, 1988) or *graffiti writer to graffiti artist* (Stewart, 2009: 83), presenting the outcome of a path that leads to cultural recognition in the mainstream art world, while simultaneously provoking tensions for remaining underground and subcultural. Later studies have contributed to the graffiti career approach,

and the fame hunt has been affiliated with a self-concept for constructing a masculine identity (Macdonald, 2002) or a route for career paths in creative labour, while challenging class-analytic subcultural theory (Snyder, 2009: 171).

Choosing spots is thus directly linked to the substance of fame, as visible spots become resources for subcultural credibility. However, Ferrell and Weide (2010: 56) note that spots are clearly not fixed or denoted as static urban locations, but are always situated in the city's complex changing physical ecology. Especially in the genre of train writing, the connection between the painted spot and the viewed spots may be disrupted, as the moving object is often painted somewhere other than where it is viewed in the city's transit system. Trainyards, layups, and terminal stations may act as spots, yet they are constantly in a changing process; trains are pulled in and out, cleaners come and go, and there are surveillance cameras operating in the area. As such, patterns of different entrepreneurs, urban policing, graffiti removal, and private security interfere with writers' ongoing struggle to get status and visibility. This specialised knowledge of the changing spatial dimensions is elsewhere recognised as subcultural 'skills' accumulated by the social community of writers with its shared goal orientation (Austin, 2001: 64–65). Graffiti writers internalise the rhythms and pulses of the city in order to access and master spots. In this way, according to Ferrell & Weide (2010: 57), spots are understood as *liquid*, as they are constantly subaltern to the city's ecological and social malleability.

As a creative subcultural resistance against the removal of graffiti from public space, Ferrell and Weide point towards the rise of graffiti media: subcultural micromedia, photographs, magazines, videos, and online media channels have altered the earlier prestige system of writing, as they have provided new subcultural spots for recognition and visibility (see also Austin, 2001: 249; Snyder, 2006). Spots become further liquefied by the increasing use of digital media and material uploaded to the internet, which disconnect the physicality of the spot and its traditional subcultural status rooted in maximum street visibility. Here, they state that the interplay between what they call *urban spots* and *mediated spots* is not only circulated globally, but circles back on their sources in a way that challenges the distinctions between source and simulation (Ferrell & Weide, 2010: 59). Current graffiti studies focusing on digital and social media present a shift insofar as they define the fame game not as a straightforward process, and they raise awareness of the fact that there are differences in fame in relation to particular media, such as the 'instafame' earned online which invokes a more genuine reputation earned offline or in analogue media (MacDowall, 2019). As such, various media also confront the essence of fame beyond a simple visibility linked to spatiality, and bring out new complexities and different meanings for fame. Moreover, they contribute to the subcultural difference, as different subcultural media come to present different meanings in relation to each other and to what could be understood as the mass media or mainstream media (Thornton, 1995; Hannerz, 2016).

The 'liquidity' of spots displayed in the wide range of media aligns with ideas of a postmodern hyperreality accompanied by a strong emphasis on agency. As such, the subcultural terrain appears as fluid, uncertain, boundless, creative, and liberating. However, despite being constantly reshaped by human action, urban space is never free from structural inequalities and social divisions (Joseph, 2008). Although Ferrell and Weide's article describes how

the patterns of spots get altered by public authorities, it does not extensively explore the patterns of unequal access to spots or how writers become able to choose urban or mediated spots beyond simple fame seeking or applying writers' moral codes (Ferrell & Weide, 2010: 54). Spots – urban or mediated – are not just liquid but bound to and shaped by the city's physical, cultural, and social order. Crucial for spotting and the interplay with spots are the cultural and social conventions with regard to the able-bodied, which relate to gender, race, and social class, and shape the ways in which writers gain access to spots or are able to stroll through the city. Bodily capacities which allow to get to hard-to-reach spots, to move in and out of specific places, and to be able to escape from risks and dangers, are integral to the practices of graffiti writers, but are also built on the normative notion of an able, white male body (Hannerz, 2017: 374–375; Macdonald, 2002). Moreover, the ability to avoid control and having access to spots is granted to bodies that are able to 'pass' unnoticed in districts or in moments of the city, often excluding racialised or gendered bodies from its space (Hannerz, 2017: 275–376). Yet, passing some place unnoticed and the overall mobility between the spots – such as travelling from one city or country to another – also involve notions of social class and economic resources necessary for such mobility.

Rather than proposing a spatial uncertainty of mediated spots, I suggest that graffiti photos and videos, as outcomes of spotting, play an important role in mapping the city's subcultural landscape and regularly function as a resource for graffiti writing. The archives of mediated spots decentralise the topographic information earlier controlled by able writers living nearby. Spots become known through the enormous archives of mediated information and are conceptualised by writers who have never visited the spot physically. Yet, spots, as a resource for subcultural play, are bound to municipal policies, and limited resources do not always serve a perspective of subcultural fame seeking, as media attention may invite 'others' to visit the spot. Thus, in the city's complex ecology, media easily become a meeting point for different social representations, and channels for micromedia are no longer relegated to narrow subcultural circuits in the way underground DIY-fanzines perhaps used to be, as many now have the ability to publish and create micromedia online. The increasing use of digital devices gives random passers-by, visiting graffiti writers, or graffiti admirers the opportunity to post graffiti online, while challenging the unified publishing logics set in localities or in subcultural divisions. This constant interplay between urban and mediated spots and between opposing media practices may enhance boundary making, and may also construct dialogues, negotiations, and conflicts in an ecology of spots.

SPOTTING TRAINS AND ARTICULATING PUBLISHING LOGICS

'Did you get 'em?', Janne asks before we even greet. He is out of breath. 'Yes, I've got them.' 'Were they good?' 'Well, look for yourself.' Janne inspects the photos for ten minutes. I thought the photos were good, but Janne criticises his [graffiti] piece. 'Check out that line, it should not go like that. Now it's bollocks!' I could not believe how self-critical he was, but he said that there was always room for improvement. (Fieldnote, 2012)

My presence in the all-male group became more or less accepted as the writers realised that I was useful in

photographing their graffiti paintings on trains while the art pieces were still 'running' in traffic. Moreover, being female perhaps put me in a better position to photograph graffiti-painted trains at a close distance and circumvent the surveillance of guards, train drivers, and conductors who occasionally would confront my male informants at the stations. During the first observation period (2011–2013), I met these writers two to three times per week, from six hours up to 24 hours per meeting. Often, the meetings involved swapping SD cards with pictures of train panels, discussing the last train writing mission, and planning the next one. Janne, like all the other writers I followed in this community, had several years' experience of train writing, and most of these writers had started writing graffiti in their early teenage years. They were active train writers committed to the time-consuming activities of scoping out train yards, planning 'missions', and spotting trains. They took their train writing seriously, and this meant not only performing strictly planned and strategic train actions, but also making sure there would be good documentation of the actual graffiti pieces; the 'panels', 'top-to-bottoms' or, at times, even 'whole carriages'.

From 2011 to 2013, the group consisted varyingly of ten white males aged between 20 and 30. Generally, this was a group whose members had had limited schooling and 'drifted around'. Many of the informants were unemployed, a few were taking vocational courses, and some had short-term jobs in industry, construction, logistics, or manufacturing. Additionally, some of the graffiti writers faced serious outcomes from police investigations that had resulted in several convictions and huge claims for damages from the railway company VR and the Helsinki Regional Transport Authority (HSL), which – considering also their low income – clearly put them in a perilous social position. These graffiti writers were not developing artistic careers and did not have jobs on the market for creative labour, despite being well-known and respected in the local graffiti scene. Rather, they had remained in the male-dominated working-class sector of society, and by 2019, only two of them had pursued higher education since the first observation period. I consider these writers to be part of the precariat class, even though they rarely articulated a clear class position for themselves.

Indeed, contemporary class formations are complex, but class consciousness seems to be troublesome for young people in these times of neoliberalism, which tends to emphasise the role of the individual, rather than articulate belonging to a social class (Jensen, 2018: 410–411).

Participating in spotting and documenting train graffiti allowed me to gain a perspective on the subculture's publishing logics, and on the ways this shaped some of the focal points within the community. The face-to-face interaction and trading of graffiti photos generated complex informal rules of what constituted a presentable photo, but most importantly, it helped decide who has the right to publish and on which media platforms. Some of the spotted trains that I witnessed were published in local graffiti magazines, yet countless graffiti pieces on trains were never published, and almost none were published online by the graffiti writers themselves. Perhaps the main goal for these writers was not to claim fame, but to be able to govern the circulation of one's own graffiti photos, for there was a difference as to *where* these photos were supposed to be published. Most of the writers preferred to publish their photos in local graffiti magazines, as these were considered the exclusive platforms for presenting a selection of ones' achievements (see Figure 2). Finnish graffiti

magazines contain mainly visual content – i.e. images of graffiti – and rarely include any articles (see Figure 3). Submitting a photograph to a graffiti magazine was guided by two principles. First, who painted the train, and second, who took the photograph. If a writer had spotted another writer's train piece, it was generally not acceptable to publish it without the consent of the author. Sometimes this did happen, however, triggering conflict inside the community:

Kari was raising his voice: 'Who gave you the permission to send in *that* photo?' Niko answered nonchalantly: 'I don't need a permission, it's *my* photo. I took the photo.' (Fieldnote, 2013)

Crucial in terms of their use, the ownership of an image is defined both by the producer of the photograph and the writer behind the graffiti piece. Some writers claimed ownership of images because of the hard work that was required to take the photo: 'He didn't have the guts to go to the station, whereas I did' or 'No one else turned up that morning'. Others dictated ownership in terms of content, with writers sometimes editing photographs of graffiti pieces in case consent was not received from all: 'Better to cut his piece out'.

Another often discussed topic was images considered 'too hot' to be published; some photos contained important time-spatial information that is useful for acquiring subcultural skills required for the practice of train writing, and in this way, they proved to be significant learning tools. For instance, analysing a bunch of photographs in magazines allowed for the construction of spatial patterns, such as one writer's development of photographing styles, or typical places where he/she usually took photographs of trains in traffic. The circulation of trains on different lines could be identified on the basis of stations or architecture recognised from a photo, which in turn helped to find potential loopholes for painting trains on specific lines. If the photo appeared to have been taken inside a train yard, the possible location could be recognised by looking at the train models and particular features in the background, such as fences or other specific objects. Graffiti writers have, as already noted, a special ability to discern the infrastructural patterns within a city and this sometimes motivated my informants to search for new and innovative spots for taking photographs, which were not typically known among their peers:

The photo of the 'top-to-bottoms' was taken in unfamiliar terrain: the old commuter train was riding over an old bridge. Nobody was able to recognise the place, and everyone was asking 'Where did you take this photo?' 'Won't tell you!', Kari laughed. (Fieldnote, 2013)

Additionally, the time a photo was taken was measured by analysing its lighting. Was a photo taken in broad daylight, or during the first rush hour in the morning? Were there any signs of winter, or rather of a summery white night? The ability to read the photos was thus an important factor in producing subcultural knowledge and obtaining substantial information for local train writing.

Some of the magazines had 'open calls' on Facebook pages or Instagram accounts; however, others collected photos only during personal encounters. The local graffiti magazines displayed various local graffiti styles, and the train writers would often rank the magazines against one another.



Figure 2. A sample of Finnish graffiti magazines, published between 2000 and 2018. Helsinki, Finland, 2019. Photograph ©Malin Fransberg.

Some magazines were more train oriented, whereas others also included sections of walls and street bombing. The graffiti magazines were also quite often considered as biased as a result of editors favouring certain graffiti writers. This was explained in an interview with one of the informants:

I think, in any graffiti media, whether it be a book, a magazine, or a video, they're always slanted. And, if you look at Finnish graffiti magazines, they've always given you a wrong picture. Hell no are they true, and the author is always recognisable, who's done it, what crews he has, it's really interpretable. (Niko, 2019)

However, this could also be realised as a promising issue:

For me, the thing is that the magazine itself is also a piece of art, and I don't want to have a [graffiti] piece catalogue. For magazines can't have an objective representation of a scene, can they? I would rather publish in a magazine that has more quality and where my piece is among the best ones. For example, I don't want to publish in X⁴, because it's published too often and that's why it has a bad filter. (Aleksi, 2019)

In these comments, Niko and Aleksi pointed out two contrasting ideals for graffiti magazines, where one proposes an impartial truth of the subcultural landscape – that is, representing the diversity of graffiti seen in the urban space from the wide range of different artists in the city. The second view proposes a subjective perspective of the scene, presenting graffiti from specific cliques often associated with the editors of graffiti magazines. Similarly, Austin (2001: 260) recognises the editors' powerful role in the subculture, and that 'getting up' in a magazine may be more dependent on who a writer knows than on his or her talent. The editors of various graffiti magazines are thus

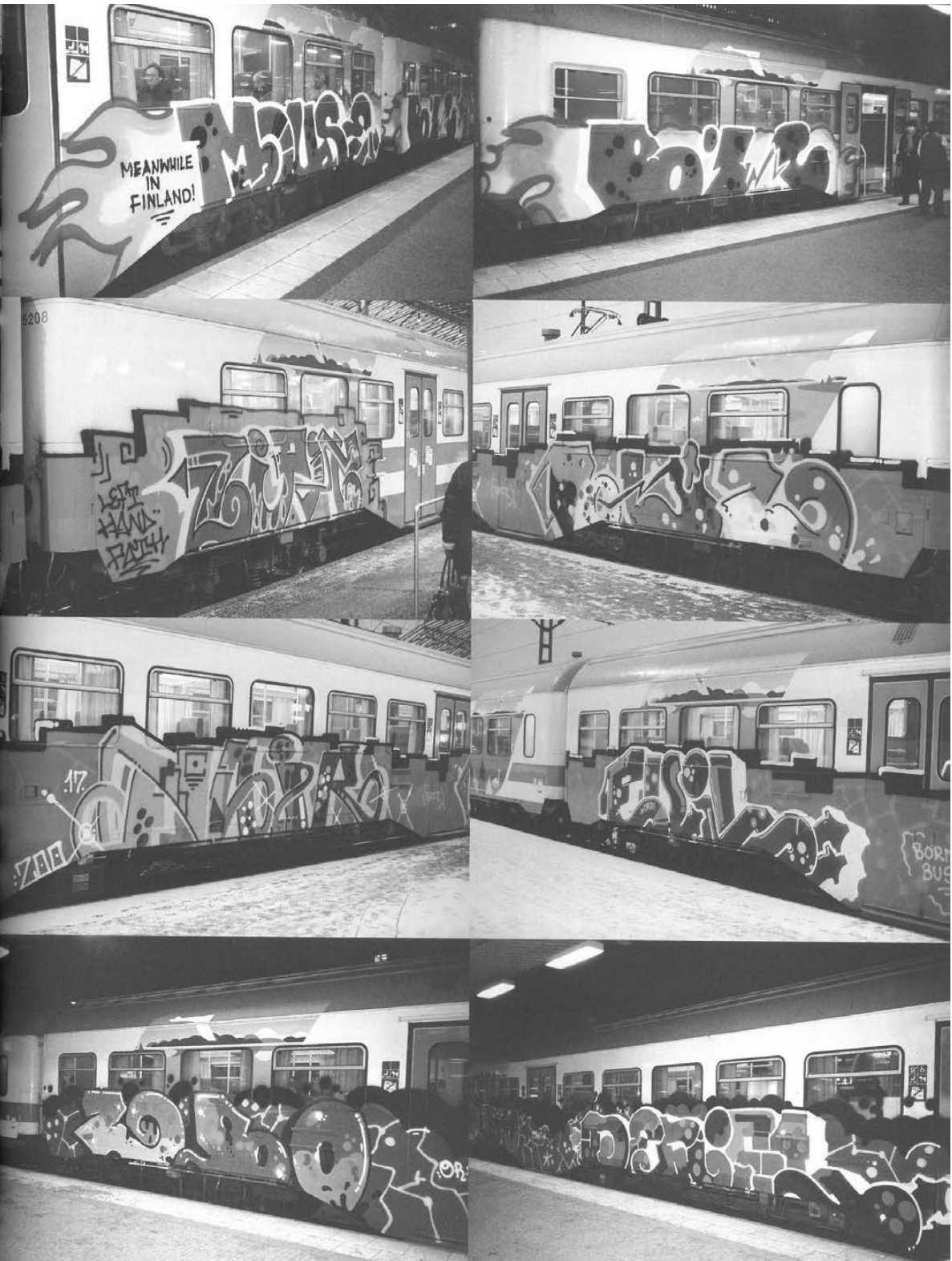


Figure 3. A page featuring train graffiti in the graffiti magazine *Adults* (Vol. 4, 2018). Design ©Adults.

Red-Devils, this is a tribute to our, once so loved, old commuters.

The change is inevitable, ofcourse. Here is the story what happened from the writer perspective.



The first top to bottoms in Finland. Done by JATSE and DACAZE (rip). Helsinki central station 1989.



ASTRON. Helsinki 1992. ASTRON did a lot of high quality masterpieces from the earliest train writing days and continued over to the 2000`s. RESPECT!

RAY52. Helsinki 1992. Next to this burner was ASTRON Main yard got hit once again.

Figure 4. A tribute to Red-Devils in the graffiti magazine *Boiling Point* (Vol. 2, 2012). Design ©Boiling Point magazine.



Diner.
Hitting the
waves with
throwups.
Bombing was
BIG in the early
90's.

For ages Finland and especially Helsinki

had commuter cars that many writers found attractive. These red steel-beasts with yellow stripes in the front, gave them a sense of being on fire. These trains were called the red-devils.

There were basically two main types of these red-devils, that got to know graffiti. (There were some exceptions naturally, but their quantity was minimal in comparison. Even older models and prototype coloured cars.)

The older red-devils are the ones with waves on the sides as seen on these two pages. In the later years they were the first to be repainted by the company (VR). VR started to repaint the wave trains in 1997/1998.

The new color theme was red and white. They basically divided the cars half, painting the upper half with white and the lower half with red.

In 1999 the last red wave train disappeared. But it wasn't such a big deal since they were probably a little less than half of the rolling stock and a lot of red trains (flats) were still in traffic. It was a common thing to always choose to paint the red flats over the red and white waves, if there was a possibility to choose. In 2005 the first flats were painted with the red-white theme and at first people were thinking it was fresh and a lot of guys hit them with pieces. Then more and more of them started popping up and the red flats started to vanish, little by little.



Midas and Cake.
Helsinki 1993.
Rolling in traffic
with good style.

recognised as important actors in the process of subcultural construction, and magazines contribute to subcultural boundary making by highlighting the ones who get published – often those graffiti writers who have already established a name for themselves in the city. On the other hand, the magazines might present up-and-coming crews and younger writers performing in a favourable style; thus, they also mark generational changes in the subcultural landscape.

EXPLORING MEDIATED SPOTS

Online publication has clearly marked a rapid change in the subculture's characteristics, especially in its ability to bring different city dwellers into a common space of communication. Generally, the observed writers were sceptical of online publishing, and they avoided publishing online themselves. Despite avoiding publishing online, they were all following various digital platforms administered either by other graffiti writers or by graffiti admirers who publish graffiti from a wide range of different artists. During the first observation period (2011–2013), Instagram was not yet widely used in the local graffiti subculture, but several sites, such as Flickr, Fotolog, and Tumblr, were actively followed by graffiti writers. Later, during the interviews conducted in 2018–2019, it was evident that Instagram had jumped into the fray, as it spontaneously became a common topic in all interviews and was presented as a dominant medium for circulating graffiti pictures. It was also on all these platforms that graffiti writers could randomly spot their own works online:

I don't cry over spotting my pieces on Instagram. I make them in public space. I often hope that they won't be there [online], but I'm not worried about it. I should cover them up or make them in hidden places if I don't want them to be seen. It's another thing if I give my picture to a friend and he publishes it without my permission. (Aleksi, 2019)

The extract above reflects the online circulation of graffiti images as a by-product of contemporary graffiti writing in public space, independent of the writers' own publishing patterns. The online sharing of images reduced the exclusivity of a graffiti piece, meaning they generally became less scoopful in printed magazines or graffiti books. But there were also useful effects; a train piece that was not spotted offline and that eventually appeared online could offer valuable documentation for the writer. Moreover, following the Instagram accounts of local train-chasing obsessives allowed train writers' to keep up to date on who painted what and on which train lines, which in turn had an effect on their everyday practices. The constant flow of online information was used to compound a spatialised knowledge of the subcultural field which directly involved one's own train writing practices. For example, if a train line was considered as having been painted too often on the basis of many online updates within a short period of time, this could indicate that a specific spot had changed in terms of its surveillance and had thus become easy to paint. On the other hand, this could also have been interpreted as the spot having become too busy, which could, in turn, lead to increased surveillance.

The participants' online interaction is best characterised as a one-way digital process of gathering information on urban spots and on how and where to paint. While observing writers in their homes, I often sat with them in front of computer screens as they were exploring spots by studying several online resources simultaneously.

The informants could spend inordinate amounts of time researching different online platforms for graffiti photos from a particular city or a specific train system, and investigating timetables and routes to enter different train lines, tunnels, and yards worldwide. Digital media, including Google Maps and train spotter websites such as Urbanrail.net, allowed these writers to engage in creative ways to plan trips to other localities for the purpose of painting different subway or train models. This was realised specifically by 'virtually' travelling to spots in different cities, such as a specific subway yard, and by interactively exploring several information resources and discovering the routes to enter them:

In a YouTube video, a group of graffiti writers have just climbed down a cement fence. They are entering the subway yard. I watch Tony rewinding the clip again and again. He pushes the pause button second by second. 'Yes, look at it. It has to be somewhere next to a street, because you can see the streetlights quickly on the right corner'. The scene is blurry, and I have difficulties in recognising any streetlight on the screen. Tony checks the Google Map again and zooms into the subway yard, setting the street view. He is persistent in finding that same cement fence seen in the video clip. 'It has to be somewhere here...', he points with the cursor on the screen. 'I will check it out next summer when I'll be traveling down there', Tony says. He then returns to study the city's subway timetable. (Fieldnote, 2013)

The interplay between different information sources enabled writers to gain a complex spatial understanding of certain geographic locations, despite their own physical location at the time. Thus, people's images and videos of urban spotting uploaded to online platforms, had created the opportunity for writers to start a form of online spotting, and it is this digital exploration of spots that characterises the digital realm as a resource for writers' subcultural play, a 'circle back on their sources', as Ferrell and Weide noted about mediated spots (2010: 59). In fact, online spotting very much simulates exploring and mastering spots in situ. A diverse set of media can thus be used to construct a cartography of graffiti spots – a mental map of what, where and when by 'following'.

PROTECTING URBAN SPOTS

Within graffiti subculture, 'collecting systems' comes down to spray painting as many different train models as possible and could be understood as an extended level of moving up from 'all cities' to 'all nations'. As the graffiti subculture has developed into a transnational movement, cities have come to represent certain tastes with their distinct train models. Graffiti writers collect different systems and often appreciate old train models; in terms of prestige, the New York City Subway has earned the status of being the most legendary object to paint, yet some writers enjoy the time-honoured RVR trains existing in Post-Soviet states, while in Finland writers value the old commuter Sml train endearingly named the 'Red-Devil' (see Figure 4). As cities employ different strategies and policies to combat graffiti, the train system itself is also affected by the policies of local authorities.

Some systems, such as the old RVR trains in Belgrade, are fully covered by graffiti, and writers struggle to find a clean or an appropriate space to cover while avoiding conflicts with other graffiti writers. Other train systems

are rigidly controlled and get cleaned continuously, like the Stockholm subway (Karlander, 2018). Moreover, different policies apply to different train systems, which, in turn, differ from each other in terms of volume and physical appearance, and therefore present different opportunities for writing surfaces in the ecology of the city's spots.

The local writers often described Helsinki as a difficult city to paint in, referring on the one hand to its zero tolerance policy, and other other to the compact train system which offers limited spots to paint on. The Helsinki metro, sometimes nicknamed the 'carrot' due to its orange colour, was built in 1982 and has only one line consisting of 25 stations. The Helsinki metro has one metro yard and only a few layups, making it the smallest metro system in the Nordic capitals. It turned into a desired transnational subcultural target for its limited accessibility, for being part of a graffiti-controlled city, and also for being the one closest to the North Pole:

It's really a wanted train [Helsinki metro]. And it does have a bad reputation [...] But maybe a bit too hard a reputation. I mean you can always *do a backjump*. It's doable. But, to do a really good piece, that's really hard to do. That's respected and wanted. I think one of the most wanted trains in Europe, maybe. (Risto, 2018)

The 'backjump' method originated in the early 1990s in Scandinavia and is a subgenre of train writing particularly used in well-guarded train systems (Kimwall, 2014: 194). In a backjump, the writer quickly completes a piece on the train in service during a prolonged stop, such as at a terminal station (Karlander, 2018). A backjump spot at a terminal station is fairly accessible compared to sealed off metro depots, and a proficient writer is able to complete a backjump within minutes. Compared to terminal stations inside tunnels, outside stations are preferable from a writer's point of view, as they are less secure and usually only necessitate a jump over a fence next to a track to reach the train. Yet, in Helsinki, there is only one outside terminal station. Thus, to paint sophisticated and complex graffiti pieces requires not only more time, but also a lot of information on routes to enter less visible spots, and on alarms and motion detectors possibly situated in these locations.

Exploring mediated spots online revealed how 'other' graffiti writers, travellers from abroad, non-locals, and graffiti tourists examined the train models and spots in Helsinki. Finnish graffiti magazines sporadically present graffiti on the Helsinki metro, but as it is different from the local commuter trains, the metro appears to be a rare object among the local writers: 'If the commuter train is hit ten times every week, the metro is painted maybe ten times in a year'. Nevertheless, the first volume of *Anti-Social* magazine presented a section of graffiti painted subway carriages. The spread depicted in Figure 5 was in no need of words as the images are sufficiently potent; in one of the photos, two writers pose in front of a carriage in a tunnel with their arms triumphantly up in the air. In another magazine, *Boiling Point* (Vol. 2, 2012), the editor's note describes just how challenging it is for a writer to have a go at the metro in the Finnish capital:

The Helsinki subway is one of the hardest trains to paint in the world. The things that make it so hard, are the size of the system and of course the city's graffiti policy, zero tolerance indeed!

Finnish graffiti movies are rare, but a few such movies published by non-locals presenting sequences of Helsinki metro graffiti can be found online. In one of them, a movie called *Hamaz II*⁵, a scene (16:30) presents the Helsinki metro 'as a system that seems to take the word impossible as its model'. Right thereafter though, the voice-over says that '...once you are here, and see it with your own eyes, you know that there is a way to make the impossible possible'. The scene continues with a group of graffiti writers quickly painting a backjump on the Helsinki metro. Graffiti videos published online of the Helsinki metro were seldomly respected by the informants, who were highly critical of how the footage revealed too much information on the local spots. It was precisely because of the limited opportunities that the train writers seemed to be keen on protecting 'their' spots of train writing:

Of course, you hope that others don't do your spots, but if they find their way in there on their own, you can't complain. The main reason [for not publishing movies] that I'm stressing about, is that you show off about how you do things. (Aleksi, 2019)

By 'showing off', media are understood to expedite the identification of the locations of specific spots, arousing the curiosity of other writers about these spots. The fear of Helsinki becoming a popular city for graffiti writers around the globe as a result of the increase in online publishing, provoked hostile attitudes among some of the informants. Moreover, the anxiety about the city becoming too exposed was reinforced by the experiences from other popular graffiti cities:

We can't have the [graffiti] tourist seasons like they have in Berlin and Copenhagen. We would not be able to paint then. [If we had the same situation we've seen] some summers in Berlin, it would be impossible for us to paint the trains here (Kari, 2018).

Therefore, too much media attention, publicity, and visibility seemed threatening for a subcultural landscape with limited resources for train writing. Aleksi proposes that local writers and authorities thus share a common rationale concerning the visibility of train graffiti in Helsinki:

I think VR and HSL want to keep up their image of having a top security system, so it's sheepish if [graffiti] stuff is seen. Like, when the Germans entered the [metro] hangar, they did a big thing about it. Again, it's like writers and authorities have the same agenda in keeping tourists outside. We have the same motivation. I don't think we can stop them [tourists], but it doesn't help us if people keep shooting their videos.

Aleksi refers to an event in 2011 when a group of graffiti writers entered the metro yard in Helsinki and painted four graffiti pieces on one of the carriages. The event was filmed and later published as a scene in an online graffiti movie. The video included several scenes of train painting missions in different European cities, and provided a peek into the transnational subcultural game of train writing, 'collecting systems' in jargon. The graffiti video became national news in 2013, when the police stated that four young men had travelled to Helsinki with the specific intention to paint the metro and that they had subsequently released a scene of the event in a graffiti movie.⁶



Figure 5. 'The carrot' in Helsinki, Finland. A spread in the graffiti magazine *Anti-Social* (Vol. 1, 2008). Design ©*Anti-Social* magazine.



Two years after the graffiti writers left the city, an international warrant was issued to arrest all four of them. Eventually they were each prosecuted, convicted, and sentenced to a six months' probation and a €10,000 fine by a Helsinki court in 2014. Among the local writers, these 'tourists' were labelled as amateurs as they had touted their novice eagerness to gain publicity for a one-time 'hit' on the Helsinki metro. For the locals, the case proved that publishing online is not without consequences, as it led the local police force to track down the offenders.

In this case, it was not only a fight against the controlling authorities, but also against 'outsiders' and those who are defined, as in the statements by Kari and Aleksi above, as 'tourists' in order to maintain a subcultural exclusiveness among the local train writers. Disputes in the graffiti community are often related to one's honour being at stake, usually as a result of a writer's tag in public space being 'crossed out' (Macdonald, 2002: 211). Likewise, others have noted that spots claimed by locals may trigger conflict if outsiders point in these spaces without permission (Ferrell & Weide, 2010: 51). With regard to the fluid realm of urban and mediated spots, and with a diverse set of contesting subcultural media players, there is a desire to understand the emerging and active use of media by those who want to stand out in the subcultural field. Here, the virtual reinforces new territories of subcultural play, altering enclaves of 'locals' and those who attempt to be in control of certain spaces in mediated and transurban subcultures.

CONCLUSION

Spatiality, or spots, are resources for subcultural play and, as such, are fought over, controlled, and used in the game of name writing, which unfolds on trains among other places. Media can be used to navigate the city's subcultural landscape and they therefore serve as a learning tool in knowing the city as your own, creating a site for spotting and belonging to subcultural play. Austin refers to this cognition as a body of spatialised local knowledge that is reproduced in the peer culture 'since the necessary [knowledge] for writing is not available elsewhere' (Austin, 2001: 65). Clearly, the expansion of online information resources challenges the notion of 'local', much in the same way that it challenges the boundaries that mark acceptable doings within the subculture, as the media actors are not merely city residents or certain groups denoted as subculturally exclusive, but also people who happen to pass by and become interested in the city as a site for subcultural play.

This article has explored a group of male graffiti writers' subcultural media practices through the methodology of spotting trains. At times, these graffiti writers were hostile towards outsiders on account of certain media practices and in the context of maintaining dominance in the city's train writing subculture. Mostly, they preferred their pieces to appear in local offline publications and graffiti magazines that exclusively involve the local scene and that are printed in small numbers. These publications distinguish themselves from the much more widely followed online media channels of what the graffiti writers called 'tourists'. The train writers in the Helsinki community would painstakingly gather information online, but would not take part in the process of uploading content and sharing their creativity online. Subcultural micromedia, such as specific Instagram accounts and YouTube videos, were preferably used to identify locations, 'mediated spots', and to gain temporal-spatial knowledge of spots in different train systems.

One may ask if the subcultural media practices of these local graffiti writers are specific to this group. This would require a larger comparative look at the ecology of spots in different cities and necessitate taking into account subcultural media practices in relation to social class, gender, ethnicity, and age. However, some general thoughts can be offered about the studied case, as the group of train writers consisted of white males employed in male-dominated, but precarious sectors of society. After years of graffiti writing, they had clearly developed a deep subcultural identity and they were obviously committed to play a part in the city's subcultural scene. Moreover, their experience with zero tolerance policies and the limited number of spots in the city, along with the criminal convictions and the ensuing economic consequences some had faced, marginalised their position in the city, even if this experience gained them respect in the local subcultural scene. Against this background, developing an artistic career on the basis of subcultural fame was challenging. The idea of a commercial graffiti career developed out of a subcultural pastime would in any case have been problematic in the sense that it implies by and large leaving behind what is 'underground' and working towards a taken for granted middle-class lifestyle 'ordinary' people strive for.

The photos of spotted trains proved to be a significant subcultural source for these graffiti writers, and surely, they would have been able to travel far with the recognition and fame earned in the form of these photos. Yet, they were eager to control the circulation of these photos for the fear of losing their limited spots to 'outsiders'. Furthermore, seeking respect and prestige in the local community was not based on simple visibility, 'fame', and a flourishing circulation of graffiti painted trains on all kinds of media channels. Rather, these writers built their subcultural judgement on prohibited and acceptable doings coupled with the limited and controlled spatiality for train writing in the city. This indicates that solutions in a distinct subcultural context are not only reduced to values of a global subculture, but work interactively with the moral codes implied in locally distinct subcultures. Whether the media practices were significant for their social background calls for further studies, and a more profound sociological analysis is thus encouraged in order to engage graffiti and street art research with questions of structural inequalities.

This article captured the theoretical intersection of cultural criminology and subcultural theory, and has provided a perspective on how urban policies, such as zero tolerance, have a dynamic influence in the shaping of boundaries and meanings of difference in subcultural media practices. In subcultural theory, exploring media practices has been crucial in defining both the subcultural difference and the social logic of subcultural capital, and the latter's relevance in illustrating a mainstream represented by the mass media (Thornton, 1995). Within graffiti subculture, fame as a form of visibility has largely been understood as the subculture's own form of subcultural capital. Yet the narrow perspective employed on the graffiti career and the alignment on the transferability of fame as a form of subcultural capital into an economic one have, in some aspects, resulted in overlooking the complexities of urban space and the ways in which it distributes power and affects cultural notions around the able-bodied in local specificities. As graffiti subculture has developed into a global game of writing, taking part in it is most likely to be the privilege of white, middle-class youth who have the means to travel and are least dependent on spots in a single city.

- 1 All fieldnotes and quotes were anonymised and translated from original scripts into English by the author, except the English quotes in Finnish graffiti magazines – these were kept in their authentic forms with their typographical errors.
- 2 For graffiti-specific slang words in this article, see the glossary e.g. in Kimwall (2014: 192–215).
- 3 Theorising zero tolerance is beyond the scope of this article. However, the following note is worth mentioning: there is a specific history of zero tolerance politics against graffiti in the Nordic countries, that, since the 1990s, has been partly lobbied for through public anti-graffiti campaigns in which many of the Nordic train companies were active (see i.e. Kimwall, 2014). The Nordic zero tolerance dictated a principle of complete censorship of both legal and illegal graffiti in public and private spaces.
- 4 A Finnish graffiti magazine, which will not be disclosed here to avoid conflicts inside the community.
- 5 Hamaz II can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3lc3AlYD6EE&t=996s>.
- 6 ‘Perpetrators of the graffiti attack on Roihupelto are known to the police’ (headline translated into English), Yle News, May 17, 2013. <https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-6646878>

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