Hietala, Iida

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Clowns, fuzzy worms and blooming flowers: becoming a 'creative child' through arts consumption

Iida Hietala [ORCID]

Department of Art and Media, Aalto University, Espoo, Finland

ABSTRACT

Focusing on three 'Instagram-ready' art installations, this article suggests that a special kind of consumer – the 'creative child' – is being developed at the intersection between immersive art spaces and social media technologies. Using a multi-method approach blending ethnography in art exhibitions and netnography on Instagram, the study elaborates on how a consumer 'becoming' – a never-ending process of forming the self – emerges from affordances of these environments that foster the elements of childlike creativity: imaginativeness, emotiveness and playfulness. It argues that 'becoming' goes beyond the social media performance of the self. Through approaching adult consumers as 'creative children', the study illustrates how the consumer is enabled to tap into creativity in novel ways, and how following the therapeutic ethos and reconnecting to the 'inner child' can create a sense of an open future, full of possibilities.

Introduction

> *Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once he grows up. (Pablo Picasso's quote in Time Magazine, 1976)*

The possibilities are endless for a creative child. The future is open, and the world is your oyster. This dreamy state of limitless capabilities and an uninhibited flight of imagination is, however, difficult to achieve. It is especially so when the consumer is already an adult, inevitably condemned to a life of adulthood responsibilities. The escape from the adult marketplace that affords a child-like experience is a rare occasion. It can range from entertaining, magical or fantasy-simulating theme parks – such as Disneyland, which offer escapism and playfulness that can lead back to the nostalgic childhood (Featherstone, 1991/2007) – to the carnivalesque gambling and partying of Las Vegas trips, which induce reckless behaviour, feelings of freedom, and infantilisation (Belk, 2000). Indeed, childlikeness and adult play in different forms are inherent to contemporary consumption: a hedonistic mentality oriented towards children's light and playful realm allows consumers to adjust to the

CONTACT Iida Hietala ✉ iida.hietala@aalto.fi 🖳 Department of Art and Media, Aalto University, Otaniementie 14, Espoo 02150, Finland

contemporary culture and its arresting reality of being a pragmatic adult (Alemany Oliver & Belk, 2021a, 2021b). However, access to 'childhood' or childhood-like experiences is not just limited to the nostalgic or ludic forms of escape from the market – therapy is another practice to access 'childhood', although not necessarily as fun as the aforementioned experiences. Indeed, children and childhood represent the unproblematic ideal of consumer self-realisation in the therapeutic ethos of the contemporary consumer culture nudging consumers towards growth (Lears, 1983). The anxieties and pains of the unsatisfying consumer society are bound to ease through therapeutic consumption (Bauman, 2007) and its experiences of renewal (Higgins & Hamilton, 2019). Somewhat different to therapeutic consumption, art and its creation have been seen as invitations for self-expression, transformation and as a means to escape the market (Kozinets, 2002). Child-like creativity especially is invoked in relation to the sphere of art (Comoy Fusaro, 2021). This research follows the exploration of adult consumers' child-like modes, but extends it by identifying and analysing some concrete moments of becoming a 'child'. It focuses on how these becomings are created and experienced, while describing a specific *type* of child invoked. Let me introduce the artistic wunderkind of the social media era – the 'creative child'.

To do so, I focus on the consumption of art. It is art consumption that allows us to understand the emergence of a creative, child-like state it proactively fosters. Art exhibitions, galleries and museums have been lately crowded with people posing in front of large-scale, colourful and interactive – Instagrammable – art installations (Palmer, 2017; Pardes, 2017; Vankin, 2015). At the same time, social media feeds have been full of these artsy photos. Installations are typically multisensory artworks designed to create an immersive and emotive experience (Bishop, 2014). For example, the Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama's iconic *Infinity Mirror Rooms* (1965–), filled with mirrors and lights creating a kaleidoscopic, visually thrilling environment, are such immersive and emotive art spaces producing unique experiences – and perhaps, sometimes, magical spaces for consumers to escape from the 'real' world. The increasing immersion, and the focus on the visual thrill that can be communicated beyond the space of the museum via smartphone cameras and social media, have been dominant developments in art installations that have been enjoying widespread success in recent years. Already in 2014, Kara Walker's *A Subtlety, or the Marvelous Sugar Baby*, a 75-foot-tall site-specific Jemima-faced sphinx made of white sugar solution set up in a factory, was approached by people with smartphones in their hands, and functioned as the hottest selfie spot in Williamsburg, Brooklyn at the time (Larson, 2014). Some installations are digital (Enhuber, 2015); installations utilising the newest of new media technologies, such as AR and VR, are set to be taking immersiveness to a whole new level (e.g. *Virtual Veronese* [2018] at The National Gallery, London). Heavy engagement with the new computational infrastructures, which include smartphones and social media, networks and profiles, characterises audiences' experiences even when installations only engage physical, non-digital materials. And experimentation with the newest technical developments, such as AR and VR, layered on top of social interaction afforded by social media, is expected to skyrocket in the near future. Within these kinds of art spaces, installations and infrastructures, consumers could possibly tap into a now-lost child-like creativity.

One example of riding this trend is a sense that some art institutions have utilised an approach of heavy 'Instagrammisation' – i.e. exhibitions might have been curated and designed from the inception with the Instagrammability of artworks in mind (it is for further research to figure out whether artists think about this too). In the vein of the 'experience economy' (Pine & Gilmore, 1999), and considering arts consumption as very experiential (Brown et al., 2000; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Joy & Sherry, 2003; Venkatesh & Meamber, 2006), the calculation of what the optimal (art) experience could be and how it could benefit the art institution does not come as a surprise. Following a long line of work in participatory and socially engaged art and other experimental art practices, museums and galleries have adopted the mindset of designing participatory cultural experiences and opportunities for co-creation (Goulding, 2000; Simon, 2010). This participatory approach has shaped both digital art spaces and art organisations' social media (Enhuber, 2015). The blurring of the boundaries between a 'consumer' and a 'producer' in the context of a museum has been championed for a while (Preece et al., 2016). By taking pictures and sharing the visited place with others, the visitors increase public awareness of the exhibition and do the marketing for the institution (Wilson-Barnao, 2016). Indeed, museums have become highly interested in harnessing Instagram as their marketing channel (Amanatidis et al., 2020; Lazaridou et al., 2017; Russo et al., 2008). It is only natural that people want to communicate their personal art experiences and engagement with the objects through social photo sharing (Budge & Burness, 2018; Budge, 2017; Jafari et al., 2013; Rhee et al., 2021; Villaespesa & Wowkowych, 2020; Weilenmann et al., 2013). However, the co-production of aesthetic experiences with the artist goes far beyond that.

Negotiating these contemporary, artistic and social profit and non-profit marketplaces, and being subject to the diverse range of the affordances and constraints of these environments, art consumers find themselves in front of a new type of experience not only in regard to art but also the formation of themselves. These photos may be seen as forms of self-expression inspired by the objects exhibited (Burness, 2016) or even as symbolic resources to work on one's identity and build narratives of the self (Kozinets et al., 2017). Especially in creating social media posts with immersive digital artworks, play is understood as an ingredient in place-making and the construction of the self (Budge, 2018).

'Self' is a central concept in consumer research (e.g. Thompson & Hirschman, 1998; Featherstone, 1991/2007; Firat & Venkatesh, 1995; McCracken, 1987; Belk, 1988; Schouten, 1991), a crucial one for the interpretation of this phenomenon, and I will discuss and develop it in relation to the notion of becoming in the theoretical section below. The consumer self and the art exhibition photography discussed in this study might bear some resemblance to the studies on selfies – the digital self-portraiture taken with a smartphone – where the notion of the self is also discussed (e.g. Iqani & Schroeder, 2016; Kedzior et al., 2016; Murray, 2015, 2018). It must be highlighted that art exhibition photos are typically other types of self-portraiture (e.g. taken by visitors' friends) than pure-bred selfies (Burness, 2016). Despite valuable previous efforts to understand self-portraiture taken with artworks on the one hand and the self in social media on the other, there are scarce descriptions and analyses of the actual selves these consumers are presenting, performing, and constructing – or even becoming – in the particular context of art spaces and social media.

As I argue in this article, the self-presentational or performative approaches, while valuable, are not sufficient if we are to grasp what happens when a consumer enters the highly immersive context of an art exhibition and simultaneously engages in creative practices with social media technologies. I explore this phenomenon through a multi-method approach combining ethnography and netnography around the consumption and the social media production of three art installations exhibited in Helsinki, Finland – the digital installation *Graffiti Nature: Lost, Immersed and Reborn* (2018) by teamLab at Amos Rex Museum; the synthetic hair installation *Nervescape VIII* (2019) by Shoplifter (Hrafnhildur Arnardóttir) at the Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma; and the clown statue installation *vocabulary of solitude* (2014) by Ugo Rondinone at Kunsthalle Helsinki. The study captures the consumer as creative – a 'creative child' – and shows how art installations transform from immersive experiences into artistic backdrops for the consumer's self-representational photography. I suggest the concept of 'becoming' to illustrate the formation and development of the self – especially when such a formation is closely tied with creative practices. Research on consumer creativity has, to date, barely touched on the consumers' selves-in-formation, the becoming that takes place in relation to their environments, and social and material aspects of these practices.

Moreover, this article contributes to the understanding of creativity in consumer research by drawing from children's developmental psychology – especially Vygotsky's (1967/2004) thinking – to adult consumers. Equipped with such a sensitised lens, I develop a concept of creativity borne by childhood practices, cultures, and infrastructures that survive to adulthood, and which could be uncovered and brought to light through art. The idea of becoming is helpful here, as it includes a temporal openness against the tendency to regard development as teleological and finite. Research on consumer creativity concentrates mainly on problem-solving (e.g. Burroughs & Mick, 2004; Hirschman, 1980, 1983; Von Hippel, 1986), and hence tends to ignore consumers' forming selves in their complex interaction with their environments, practices, and other social, technical and material dimensions that are central to their becoming. Neither does it consider the deep time of the duration of life. My article aims to address this gap. Ultimately, it uncovers a tendency, in marketing, to tap into forces far beyond those considered accessible and objectifiable, such as feelings and sensations, practices and experiences that are closed off in the past. Through art, it seems possible to immerse consumers into the processes through which they were and are becoming, which is a great source of energy that can drive social networks, art institutions and other sectors and structures. The idea of 'becoming a creative child', unlocked through technologically mediated (captured and shared) art experiences, is central to this article and guides the investigation presented herewith.

The article is structured as follows. I first provide a brief overview of prior literature on the concepts of becoming and consumer creativity. I then present the research context, the multi-method methodology utilising both ethnography and netnography, the data, and the grounded theory approach behind this research. In the following sections, I unpack the data and present my findings, drawing on the literature on the development of creativity in children (e.g. Vygotsky, 1967/2004). I first explore my data by highlighting creative activities described by the adult participants, which position them as artistic

'children' through their experience of participation and their social media activity. I then focus on the colours dominating the artworks and the artistic experiences of the consumers and the link of colour to emotion, as well as childhood and (colour) therapy. Thirdly, I explore playful interaction, world-creation and pretend-play in their social contexts as demonstrated by the participants. Finally, in the discussion section, I conclude that, against the discourses of infantilisation and narcissism, a positive appraisal of becoming a 'creative child' could be made.

Becoming: the continual formation of the consumer self

In consumer research, the formation of the self has traditionally been regarded as a somewhat conscious (consumption) project on behalf of the consumer: here, consumers construct and express certain identities through consumption choices (Bauman, 2007; Featherstone, 1991/2007; Firat & Venkatesh, 1995; Holt, 1997; Belk, 1988; Schouten, 1991). This has been understood as a continual process as consumers find new identity projects during their lifetimes (McCracken, 1987) and construct narratives around their identities (Thompson & Hirschman, 1998; Shankar et al., 2009). More recently, their 'having' and possessing have transformed into 'being' (Shankar & Fitchett, 2002), and consumers' selves are also seen to be in flux (Belk, 2014) to the extent that consumers are seen to be construing themselves (Firat & Dholakia, 2017).

New technologies have emerged as powerful new elements in the processes of constructing the self. From Haraway's (1991) seminal reconceptualisation of the body/ technology divide to Belk's (2013, 2014) extended digital self, the digital world is seen to co-constitute the self. The digital self has often been understood through the Goffmannian idea of the presentation or performance of multiple selves for different audiences. In Belk's (2013, 2014) theorisation, new technologies offer a means of self-presentation, self-extension, re-embodiment, and co-construction of the self. More recently, the self is considered to be not only shaped by but co-constituted by social media activity which supports multiple performances of multiple aspects of the self; as Kerrigan and Hart (2016) describe in their account of multiple temporal selves, social media personas are many and may include, for instance, the 'professional' or 'social' self. Indeed, it has been argued that social and collaborative information technologies allow for the construction and maintenance of multiple subjectivities (Fırat & Dholakia, 2017). Using this line of argument, a selfie could be posited as a tool for constructing an identity narrative. Taking a selfie is, in part, a consumption practice tied to the neoliberal forms of identity and the self, tying together self-expression and self-branding (Iqani & Schroeder, 2016; Kedzior et al., 2016). Art, to complement this trend, has been traditionally seen as one of the practices and experiences central to the development of the self (Venkatesh & Meamber, 2006) also in the art selfie form (Kozinets et al., 2017). As Belk (2013, p. 494) notes, 'The concept of self is also challenged and changed by the new possibilities offered in our digital world', suggesting new possible selves are still to emerge.

In this context, and for the purpose of the article, I understand 'self' as a continuity of lived experiences from birth (Blackman et al., 2008). Such self has resonance with constructed and performed subjectivities and the arguments outlined above about multiple selves co-constituted with social media – that is, a concept that puts emphasis on

relationships, media and environments through which selves change and unfold over time. In addition to the foci in the marketing literature outlined above, I suggest focusing on becoming – that is, a process of continual change where various forces traverse selves without constituting them as a whole, complete and closed individual (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987/2014, 1991) – can help unpack processes and experiences rather than presented identities and ready 'masks'. While there is representation and performance through photographs on social media, becoming is not all about representation. Often, art and its practices are interwoven in the processes of becoming, and constantly evolving subjectivities (Hickey-Moody, 2010). Using the notion of becoming within the context of art and social media shifts the emphasis from an understanding of self-production through expression or presentation to the selves that are immersed in experiences and undergo processes of change because of the relations they engage in (whether with humans, artworks or technologies). Such selves are open to forces larger than they are and which they are not fully in control of, tapping into energies of childhood and possibilities of life rather than delineating the confines of selves performed on social media.

On consumer creativity: and the possibilities of looking at it through the development of creativity in children

Consumption and its links to creativity is a somewhat underexplored topic. Despite the reigning neoliberal creativity and innovation discourses colouring the field of marketing and the whole consumer culture (Zwick et al., 2008; see also, e.g. Florida, 2002), an individual consumer's creative expression is still a nascent field of study. Consumer creativity has been typically formulated as an individual's psychological problem-solving process resulting in new and innovative solutions (Burroughs & Mick, 2004; Dahl & Moreau, 2007; Hirschman, 1980, 1983; Von Hippel, 1986). Any step outside conventional consumption practices – generating a novel and, especially, functional outcome – is regarded as creative here (Burroughs & Mick, 2004). Recently, scholars have increasingly paid attention to the networked and participatory digital production culture (see, e.g. Benkler, 2006; Jenkins & Bertozzi, 2008), consumers' creativity in creating content in new media contexts (see, e.g. Burgess, 2006) and collective organisations of consumer creativity (see, e.g. Kozinets et al., 2008; Weijo et al., 2018).

In some instances, consumer creativity has been linked to aesthetics and playfulness: everyday expressions of personal aesthetics, such as home decorating, weaving or gardening, are apparent demonstrations of consumers' creativity (Dahl & Moreau, 2007; Holt, 1997). These creative actions with aesthetic dimensions connect the traditional problem-solving approach with more artistic forms of consumer creativity. Also, people are seen to learn to appreciate aesthetics by playing with various objects (Burroughs & Mick, 2004). New expressions thus emerge from all kinds of playful and immersive experiments – which, however, sometimes might require some rules and constraints to be experienced as motivating and as enjoyable as possible (Dahl & Moreau, 2007).

To contribute to an understanding of creativity in consumer research, and to tie it to the theorisation of the development of the self as becoming – the continual change of the self –, I draw from the perspective of developmental psychology. It considers the development of creativity in children and maintains that children take part in the creation of knowledge at different ages and developmental stages they go through (Sawyer, 2003).

As noted in the Introduction, I make use of this perspective to understand creativity in adult consumers as linked to the a priori creativity of children, whereas following abductive ideas of grounded theory methods, I arrived at this particular theoretical field after taking a first glance at the data (Gioia et al., 2012; Goulding, 2002; Goulding & Saren, 2010). Although there are many seminal theorists, such as Jean Piaget (1927/1997), in the discipline of development psychology, I find the thinking of Vygotsky (1965/1971; 1967/2004), a more socially oriented constructivist psychologist, most informative for this research, and having a lot to contribute to marketing theory and its conception of creativity as socially enabled rather inwardly personal.

In *Imagination and Creativity in Childhood* (1967/2004), Vygotsky states that creativity and creative activities change over the course of a person's life: for example, a child's experiences, imagination, and hence creativity, are different from an adult's. In fact, he even stated that 'products of true creative imagination in all areas of creativity belong only to those who have achieved maturity' (p. 32), meaning that adults might be more creative than children despite the cultural narrative of children's rich imagination. Yet, in his works, he has extensively described different creative activities of children, highlighting the importance of supporting everyone to develop at their own pace. These multiple perspectives on children's creativity, such as the imaginative aspects, are utilised in the findings sections. It also must be reiterated that, for Vygotsky, theorising art experiences and aesthetics is only possible from the perspective of the social. In *The Psychology of Art* (1965/1971), he writes, 'Art is the social technique of emotion, a tool of society which brings the most intimate and personal aspects of our being into the circle of social life. [. . .] It would be more correct to say that emotion becomes personal when every one of us experiences a work of art: It becomes personal without ceasing to be social' (p. 249). This is rather fitting in the context of social media.

Research methods

Context: three ('Instagrammable') artworks

To investigate the process of the formation and becoming of a consumer self through creative moments, I explore the online and offline hustle around three artworks – *Graffiti Nature: Lost, Immersed and Reborn* (2018), *Nervescape VIII* (2019) and *vocabulary of solitude* (2014) – exhibited in Helsinki, Finland, in 2018 and 2019. I chose these installations because the artists and their exhibitions had attracted Instagram interest around the world already before coming to Finland (e.g. Stinson, 2018; Zhong, 2017). Helsinki was no different, and it was evident right from the start that these exhibitions were featuring particularly 'Instagrammable'[1] installations.

The first project is the wildly popular digital installation *Graffiti Nature: Lost, Immersed and Reborn* (2018) by the Japanese interdisciplinary artist collective teamLab, shown at Amos Rex Museum. This installation is a psychedelic forest with mazes, blooming flowers, splatters of paint, lizards, bugs, and mirrors and allows visitors to 'investigate human behaviour in the information age' by interacting with the artwork. A visitor can insert more geckos in the artwork by scanning a coloured-in drawing, make the flowers bloom by standing still, and keep crocodiles alive by avoiding stomping on them (Amos Rex, 2019; Wainwright, 2018) The second installation, *Nervescape VIII* (2019), by the Icelandic

artist Shoplifter (Hrafnhildur Arnardóttir), installed on the ceiling of the Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma, is constructed of bright-coloured synthetic hair and arranged in formations resembling nerve cells (Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma, 2019). The fluffy installation can be touched, fondled and even hugged. Finally, *vocabulary of solitude* (2014), an installation by the Swiss artist Ugo Rondinone, fills three spacious gallery rooms of Kunsthalle Helsinki with realistic-looking clown statues sitting or lying on the ground beneath two large rainbow paintings – *vierzehnterseptemberzweitausendundfünfzehn* (2015) and *achtundzwanzigsterjunizweitausendundsechzehn* (2016) –, which are reminiscent of the wooden rainbow stacker toy of the traditional German toy manufacturer Grimm's. The clowns wear colourful overalls and represent different genders and races. They look like they are relaxing or meditating: the idleness of clowns expresses a balancing act between happiness and melancholy, and the ensemble of statues constitutes a narrative of a day in the life of an individual immersed in ordinary activities such as breathing, sleeping, laughing, and even farting (Kunsthalle Helsinki, 2019).

Research strategy

In this study, I apply an interpretive grounded theory research strategy (Denzin, 1997, 2001; Gioia et al., 2012) to develop a new concept – 'becoming a creative child'. The insights emerge from my ethnographic practice, based on an interpretive take on ethnography – especially building on the strand combining new ethnographic writing with humanistic-inspired, creative methodologies (Denzin, 1997, 2001), because the humanities could offer 'major potential contributions to our understanding of consumer behaviour [...] and vice versa' (Holbrook, 2006, p. 716). Thus, this stance is aligned with interpretive consumer research (Thompson et al., 1998; Shankar & Patterson, 2001) and opens a door for methodological pluralism that consumer scholars encourage.

My ethnographic practice blends ethnography (Pink, 2013) in art exhibitions and netnography (Kozinets, 2010, 2019) on social media. This approach guides me to conduct research with, through, and in digital media – ranging from photography and video to smartphones and social media – and covering both online and offline environments (Pink et al., 2015; Pink, 2013). The exhibition and social media practices I am interested in render the ethnographical concept of place ubiquitous and constantly in flux (Hjorth & Sharp, 2014). Hence, I investigate various modes of presence, transcending the boundaries of exhibition visits and social media practices related to the subject of my inquiry. The various modes of presence also lead to gathering different types of data from both online and offline environments – some of them later emerging as more important than others. Different types of online and offline data offered me multiple entry points for the analysis and interpretations later on. In the following, I separate ethnography and netnography – or online/offline – from each other to clarify my data collection, even if this distinction is rather artificial (Pink, 2013).

Data collection

The ethnographic offline data gathered in the art exhibitions include observations and interviews. The gathering of the data took place for a period of over twelve months, over a series of four visits to each exhibition: in November and December 2018 to Amos Rex; in June, July, August and September 2019 to the Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma; and

in October and November 2019 to Kunsthalle Helsinki. My double role of both observing and interviewing required sensitivity: I did not wish to disturb anyone while they were experiencing the artwork. Yet, in order to record people's experiences accurately, I had to approach them before they left the show. People were informed verbally about the affiliation and the nature of the study and were asked for their consent to participate. In total, 30 short interviews (5–10 minutes in length) were conducted, ten from each exhibition. I approached the interviews as conversations or dialogues to empathetically hear and understand the interviewees' meaning-making (Warren, 2001). However, I still had an outline structure to guide the interviews: first, I asked the interviewees to tell me about their experience visiting the exhibition (e.g. who they are with, how does the exhibition or installation feel, what kind of thoughts does it provoke, how does it differ from other exhibitions they have visited), and then about the photographs they took (e.g. why this installation, how did you decide to create this photo with these elements, how did it feel to take photos). The observational data consists of photos and video clips (see Heath & Vom Lehn, 2004; Vom Lehn et al., 2001), and, as a supportive data source, handwritten field notes of how people moved in the exhibitions and used the gallery space for their photoshoots. The field notes helped me to remember and access the details of their movements and interactions later in the analysis (Walford, 2009).

The online dataset consists of screenshots of public Instagram posts, including the photos and captions (50 of each artwork; 150 in total), and chat exchanges (23 in total) on Instagram Direct (private chat). The brief exchanges were meant to support the analysis of the already visually and textually rich posts. Hashtag mapping helped to determine keywords worth exploring (Highfield & Leaver, 2015; Locatelli, 2017): screenshots were taken from the feeds of the museums' hashtags (#amosrex, #kiasma, #taidehalli), installations' hashtags (#graffitinature, #nervescape, #vocabularyofsolitude), the exhibitions' hashtags (#teamlabmassless, #nervescape, #everyonegetslighter) and especially the location tags (Amos Rex, Kiasma, Kunsthalle) during the time of the exhibitions.[2] I took screenshots of the images, which included the person who was the Instagram account holder alongside the artwork, so no posts of the artwork on its own were included. Captions accompanying Instagram pictures were written either in English or Finnish: grammatical errors and typos are not edited, and the Finnish language texts are translated into English (by author). Video clips and 'Instagram Stories' were not included in the data. I organised the chat exchanges by sending messages on Instagram Direct to people who had posted something publicly for everyone to see that was related to the exhibition (private posts are only visible for selected followers) and asked whether they would be available for an offline interview in a local café or for an online interview in the chat. Out of the one hundred people approached, twenty-three replied, each preferring the chat option – perhaps, because of its easiness, the feeling of being protected by the screen or the habitual mode of communicating via texting. The chat exchanges were brief (people typically replied with a couple of sentences), and followed a similar structure as in the on-site interviews. The participants in both online and offline exchanges were mainly women, 18–50 years of age. Most of them were from Finland, but there were also tourists from Europe and Russia. Data in all forms built up rapidly and stayed relatively similar despite the different exhibitions (especially, the similarity of pictures taken in the same exhibitions was striking). Table 1 provides an overview of the dataset that allows qualitative insights into my research questions.

Table 1. Data overview table.

Context	Data Material	Method	Total Number	Outcome
Online on Instagram	Screenshots	Observation	150 (50 from each exhibition)	Instagram screenshots, including both the photo and the caption. Thematic outcomes: imaginativeness, emotiveness, playfulness.
	Chat exchanges	Semi-structured interviewing	23 (*Graffiti Nature 8*; *Nervescape VIII 9*; and *vocabulary of solitude 6*)	Brief exchanges to support other material. Thematic outcomes: imaginativeness, emotiveness.
On-site at art exhibitions	Brief interviews	Semi-structured interviewing	30 (10 from each exhibition)	5–10 minute interviews on site Thematic outcomes: imaginativeness, playfulness.
	Photos and videos	Observation	Around 100 photos, 20 videos	Photos and videos taken with the researcher's smartphone to support the analysis. Thematic outcomes: playfulness.
	Field notes	Observation	A notebook	Handwritten notes and mnemonics to support the analysis later on. Thematic outcomes: playfulness.

In gathering and preparing the data for analysis, I took ethical matters seriously and followed my university's ethical standards and guidelines, and also those of the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity, and the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity. Moreover, a netnographic study requires a high level of empathy towards the participants, and one needs to attend to the sensitivity of the data in social media environments (Kozinets, 2019). For instance, the interview data or the content posted online is not sensitive *per se*, and many people have wanted to publicly show their photos on Instagram. Yet, I decided to fully anonymise all data and use pseudonyms to guarantee utmost participant privacy in the ever-changing social media landscape.

I have particularly engaged with the problem of how to represent the visual social media material central to my study (Pink, 2013). Despite the convenience of using screenshots to illustrate the data (Kozinets, 2019), visual social media data may jeopardise the privacy of the participants. Therefore, I decided to use photos in the findings section that are neither part of the dataset nor involve any study participants to avoid social media lurking and create a more empowering virtual space for the participants (Jeffrey et al., 2021). Instead, I use illustrative examples taken by other visitors of the exhibitions, for which I obtained written informed consent for publication from the people who hold the copyright for the photos. Hence, the figures in this article illustrate – and resemble – the style, colours and atmosphere of the photos that were a part of the dataset. Although permissions were granted, to ensure added security and privacy, the faces of the individuals in the photos have been blurred as they are private individuals, and the digital landscape continues to evolve, prompting increased caution around privacy.

Analysis

My analysis involved multiple steps, following the phases of grounded theory (Gioia et al., 2012; Goulding, 2002; Goulding & Saren, 2010; as well as thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and thematic network analysis (Attride Stirling, 2001). First, I immersed myself in the data by transcribing the interviews, using the handwritten field notes, looking at the photos and videos, scrolling through the Instagram screenshots, and jotting down ideas. As a result of this phase, I generated the early initial codes of 'creativity', 'children', and 'happiness'. This was the moment I got interested in the literature on the development of creativity in children, following abductive principles of grounded theory to go back and forth between data and theory (Gioia et al., 2012; Goulding & Saren, 2010; Goulding, 2002).

In the next phase of the analysis, I attempted to refine those tentative codes. For this, the screenshots proved themselves to be the richest data: I gave equal value to the photo and the caption to understand the interplay between these two forms of expression and the multimodality in one single post, which was the key to unlocking the themes (Pink, 2013). The on-site interviews at the exhibitions shed light on people's thoughts and experiences, and the observations informed how they moved, acted and played around the installations, while the online chats supported the interpretations made of the screenshots. As the screenshots with their photos and captions were clearly the richest material, they were the main sources in helping to generate the more abstract codes and intersecting issues into conceptual themes. I reviewed these themes next to the initial ideas and the emergent sensitising frame of developmental psychology to inform thematic arrangements. The final, refined thematic entities were 'imaginativeness', 'emotiveness',

and 'playfulness'. These lead to the becoming of a 'creative child', as my ethnographic narrative, which connects different threads and data points together (Thompson et al., 1998; Shankar & Patterson, 2001), will show.

Findings

The contribution of this study is to propose and substantiate the notion of 'becoming a creative child' – a specific 'child' version of the consumer self – through a process carried out iteratively between experiencing an art exhibition and the related use of social media. The 'creative child' emerges through three elements of children's creativity: imaginativeness, emotiveness, and playfulness. These are the themes discovered through the analysis of the various forms of data. The following sections present these elements in relation to the gathered data material.

Imaginativeness: every child is an artist

Imaginativeness and creativity were the major themes that emerged from the data. It is immediately clear that taking pictures with the artworks specifically designed for that purpose made people feel creative. As noted above, consumer creativity is understood as producing a novelty of some sort. From a psychological perspective, and contrary to popular belief, creativity is not only the territory of extraordinary and talented individuals, but of everyone who uses their imagination to create, modify or combine new objects, concepts or actions (Sawyer, 2003; Vygotsky, 2004). In the data I obtained, novelty appeared to be profoundly connected to creativity. For instance, Lotta mentioned on an Instagram chat that her photo of *Graffiti Nature* made her feel more creative because she has 'never posted a picture like that before':

> I liked the colours of this artwork the most, and that is why I wanted a picture in front of it. It was a little uncomfortable to take pictures because there were a lot of people, but really many people take pictures, so I don't think anyone was too bothered. [. . .] I chose this for Instagram because it has the best lighting. I also took other pictures, for instance, in front of the waves [i.e., another artwork] but they didn't really look like I wanted. I felt more creative than usual because I have never posted a picture like that before.

Not only the action of posting but being able to create a picture like that for the first time was an unusual experience that could be regarded as creative. In their social media captions, some visitors declared straightforwardly that they felt creative or even artistic. One compared herself jokingly to Picasso 'In my element 🎨 #picasso #orjustme #art #artsy [. . .]', while another ironically titled their own 'artwork' as 'Me at Kiasma by me, 2019. 🎨 '. Both used the artist palette emoji – either to visualise the context of art or perhaps to illustrate their agency in the creation of the 'artwork' posted online. They also acted, especially with *Graffiti Nature*, as if they were making art—'painting' flowers on the walls with their hands (see Figure 1).

Scholars traditionally draw links between artistic creativity and children (Sawyer, 2003). Starting perhaps with Freud (1907/1959, p. 25), imagination and fantasies are considered to be rooted in childhood. For him, an artist resembles a playing child: '[. . .] every child at play behaves like a creative writer, in that he creates a world of his own, or, rather, rearranges the things of his world in a new way which pleases him'. The creation of social

Figure 1. 'Painting' flowers on the walls. A photo taken with *Graffiti Nature: Lost, Immersed and Reborn* (2018). Illustrative example taken by exhibition visitors. Image courtesy of the copyright owner.

media posts as the playing out of a fantasy, prompted by the installations, emerged as an activity related to the creation of a little world. These 'artworks' – social media posts – consist of a photo taken at the exhibition, a caption, sometimes illustrated with emojis, and the tags of the location and the accompanying people. Typical photos are vivid and full of colour, outshining the less colourful photos otherwise filling the feeds. In the data I collected, the pictures always included the person who was posting the photo (as mentioned above); but in general, amongst Instagram photos related to the exhibitions, the pictures including the visitor themselves in the frame far outweighed the photos of artworks or their parts on their own (see Figure 2). Short captions were clearly the crucial tool to describe the picture, the colours of the artwork or the mood of the person in the photo. In many cases, emojis were added to illustrate what a person wanted to say. Location tags, for their part, brought a wider context of where the photo was taken – and, perhaps, also communicated the whereabouts of the person. The ludic arrangement and rearrangement of all these elements of a social media post were clearly a sort of activity resembling a child's creativity in constructing, playfully, a pleasing small world within the confines of the technical affordances of the social media platform.

The creation of the photo itself can be seen as related to the activity of drawing (see Figure 3). Although the photos are not actual drawings, drawing – as a creative activity significant in childhood and giving children accessible ways to express their concerns (Vygotsky, 2004) – is enhanced and transformed by today's digital tools. The act of taking

Figure 2. Immersed into the artwork. A photo taken with *Graffiti Nature: Lost, Immersed and Reborn* (2018). Illustrative example taken by exhibition visitors. Image courtesy of the copyright owner.

and modifying a photograph with digital tools is one of the most accessible and widespread ways to produce an image. This often involves working on the image through widely available apps, filters and functions, such as crops and other edits. When taking a picture of *Nervescape VIII* in Kiasma, Sofia said that the original photos '[didn't] usually look like they do in reality'. Thus, she needed to adjust saturation 'to bring out the colours'. People repeatedly noted that they edited, used filters and applied other built-in effects to enhance the photos after attending the exhibitions. Making an Instagram post follows specific rules, conventions and paths that every user needs to take, while a variety of different edits and own 'creative' solutions remain open. The interviewees exhibited great awareness of what a good photo would look like on Instagram while enjoying the creative process of making such a photo.

The process of creating a photo of the installations was described by the participants in a detailed manner, sometimes by applying vocabulary directly associated with photography. Some of the interviewees explicitly evaluated their photos on the basis of their aesthetic qualities, using photographic terms, such as lighting, colour, and angle. In her interview about *vocabulary of solitude*, Anni said that 'I made a bit of an effort to get this picture a little more relaxed, it would have been more fun if I had just focused it right', and in with *Nervescape VIII*, Riina noted that the installation seemed to have different

Figure 3. Drawing lines. A photo taken with *Graffiti Nature: Lost, Immersed and Reborn* (2018). Illustrative example taken by exhibition visitors. Image courtesy of the copyright owner.

proportions, with things appearing closer or further away when viewed through the lens. The process of creation is complex: imagination relies on internal and external perceptions, experiences, accumulation, reworking, association, dissociation, and reproduction, and it takes time – the act of creation is 'typically only the climactic moment of birth that occurs as a result of a very long internal process' (Vygotsky, 2004, p. 25). Moreover, the body informs imagination and, hence, contributes to the art experience (Joy & Sherry, 2003). In my data, there is significant evidence of a contemplative, bodily-engaged process of immersing oneself in the artwork, posing with it, and looking at oneself – mediated by engagement with technological affordances the exhibition visitors played with as the photographs are taken.

Furthermore, reproduction and exaggeration are classical elements of children's creativity. When drawing and making up stories, children draw on adults' worlds and use imagination to combine and re-combine their elements. They reproduce the worlds on their own terms and create newness (Vygotsky, 2004). In her brief interview, Liisa noted that '[...] this [*Nervescape VIII*] becomes a whole new artwork when you take a picture of it'. Creative reworking also entails dissociation – one separates out elements of the artwork and alters, transforms and unites them again as one pleases (echoing the rearranging discussed above). Children may also have an enthusiasm for exaggerating and minimising. 'We exaggerate because we want to see things in an exaggerated form, because this exaggeration corresponds to our needs, to our internal state. Children's passion for

exaggeration is well reflected in fairy tale images' (Vygotsky, 2004, p. 26). All the installations I studied encouraged exaggeration, but it was *Nervescape VIII* that thrived on it. The huge installation hanging from the ceiling was of such a size and proportion that it shrank adults to the size of children, actively making children out of the adult attendees.

The visitors played with words, too. Vygotsky's (2004) emphasised literary or verbal creativity of school-age children. On Instagram, it is in the captions of the posts that such literary engagement and verbal play took place. For instance, *Nervescape VIII* was accompanied by instructions to encounter the i gently, 'as it was a shy old mammoth'. In the captions, people repeated these instructions numerous times in different forms, for instance, calling the artwork a mammoth or saying that they were hugging an extinct giant (they hugged the synthetic hair sculptures in the photos too; see Figure 4). To Vygotsky's (2004, p. 46), a child succeeds in one's writing when having to write about something that one understands and that 'engages one's emotions', and 'encourages him to express his interior world in words'. In their captions, as well as in their pictures, the visitors repeatedly engaged their emotions, repeated the words that were suggested to them and exaggerated those, and engaged with repetition, exaggeration and visual drawing. They were clearly engaged in creative practice, generating novelty out of the combination of available elements, including those of the artworks themselves and the technical capacities of the platforms they were using.

Figure 4. Hugging the installation. A photo taken with *Nervescape VIII* (2019). Illustrative example taken by exhibition visitors. Image courtesy of the copyright owner.

To cultivate a child's creativity, the child must be offered a wide variety of experiences – this boosts 'the operation of his imagination' (Vygotsky, 2004, p. 15). For adults, artworks that fuel the imagination result in higher engagement (Stavraki et al., 2018). These particular exhibitions seem to have been designed to boost the imagination, combined with an invitation to co-create through image-taking and experience the world as children through repetition and exaggeration. The experiences designed for the visitors, in which they happily partook and innovated, actively positioned and engaged them as 'children'.

Emotiveness: feeling like a little kid

The expression of emotion ran high and played a significant role both in the exhibitions and on Instagram. In general, emotions and feelings are seen as integral ingredients of both consumption experiences (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982) and art experiences (Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson, 1990; Dewey, 1934/2005). It is also widely known and useful to note that creativity and imagination draw on affective elements (Vygotsky, 2004).

The visitors stated, both while at the exhibitions and on Instagram chat, that *Graffiti Nature* and *Nervescape VIII* especially were 'fun' and 'joyful', and made them feel 'happy' and 'excited'. Captions – such as 'Rediscovering the feeling of joy is so amazing and wonderful. I will enjoy it as much as I can 🌀' and 'How colourful fur humps can make a person this happy?' – illustrate how people narrate the artworks' influence on their emotional states. The pictures they posted on Instagram support the verbal descriptions with depictions of smiling faces, relaxed poses, and a lot of physical contact with the upbeat-coloured artworks (see Figures 5 and 6). With *vocabulary of solitude* captions, people offered a wider range of emotions alongside 'the happy talk'. The sculpted clowns' passive postures and the exhibition's meditative atmosphere prompted people to use words such as 'calm' and 'thoughtful', and place themselves in the pictures sitting still or laying on the ground to show serenity and tranquillity. Most of the accounts follow a similar path of repeating an assortment of emotions in line with those offered by the exhibitions and acceptable to show on social media.

Of those emotions described above, especially the emotion of happiness is strongly connected, at least in the common public narrative, with childhood. With *Graffiti Nature*, Alma explained on Instagram chat that 'we took pictures right in that room because it had such a good atmosphere and I got a childish feeling; I just picked the picture [for Instagram] because it shows the happy feeling I experienced at that time'. A caption of *Nervescape VIII* says that

> 'I was actually a lot more excited in that exhibition than in this picture 😬 so everyone who knows me a little better knows that I love everything fluffy so it goes without saying that I was like a little kid excited over there 🧸 #kiasma'.

A Nervescape caption even offered advice to become a child, to enjoy and be happy: 'as you grow older, your biggest challenge is to avoid becoming dead inside – so explore and try new things, try to maintain your childlike will to try [out new things] and meanwhile try to enjoy the ride'.

By linking a 'childish' feeling to being 'happy', the visitors establish a firm connection between their happiness and their childhood. Nostalgising a magical childhood is typical

Figure 5. Joyful pose. A photo taken with *Nervescape VIII* (2019). Illustrative example taken by exhibition visitors. Image courtesy of the copyright owner.

Figure 6. Immersing into the artwork: flowy hair and artwork's hair. A photo taken with *Nervescape VIII* (2019). Illustrative example taken by exhibition visitors. Image courtesy of the copyright owner.

of spectacular, playful consumption (Belk, 2000). These exhibitions work on producing happy emotions by staging environments that transport visitors back to their childhoods through creative activity, use of colour and other elements that I will address next. The emotional intensity of uninhibited 'happy childhood' follows an immersion into these environments.

The recurring theme of 'colourful' is one strand of emotional talk. It appears to be a quintessential way of describing the artworks and experiences related to them. As all three artworks are bright and colourful, and show colours atypical of everyday environments in Northern Europe, almost all the pictures taken in these exhibitions are colourful too: *Graffiti Nature* posts boast of flowers and splatters of paint against a black background; *Nervescape VIII* images parade bunches of the neon-coloured furs; and *vocabulary of solitude* pictures display clowns in multicoloured clothes hanging out in front of large rainbows. In the museum, Liisa explained in detail which colours she wanted to include in the picture of *Nervescape VIII*:

> I'm trying to get enough of fur in the frame. Wait a second, now it's pretty good actually . . . when there's a bit more red and a bit more yellow it looks so much better. Yes, this red comes out just fine. This is how I am going to do it.

Colours were applauded in the Instagram captions as well. For instance, one user declared in his *Nervescape VIII* caption, '✦ Have a colourful weekend!✦ [. . .] Finally a place that is colourful enough for me! 😎😎🎊 [. . .]', and another jokingly asked their followers to 'guess my favourite colour :)'.

Colour was used extensively by the users to channel their emotions, backed up by captions. Culturally, people express their internal states, emotions, and feelings with 'images of imagination', for which different colours are used: '[. . .] mourning is indicated by the colour black, happiness by white, serenity by light blue, and rebellion by red' (Vygotsky, 2004, p. 18). A typical way of taking a photo in these exhibitions is to utilise the combination of multiple bright colours. However, with *Nervescape VIIII* some people concentrated on individual colours, especially the pink tones: for instance, multiple Instagram users posted pictures of themselves against pink fur with captions – such as 'everything's pink 💗🎀💅' and 'Pink mess 🐷' – to highlight the cute and 'girly' aspects of the experience the artwork evoked (see Granot et al., 2014). The associations were not exclusively stereotypical or banal – the visitors of the *vocabulary of solitude* brought up the cultural connections between rainbow colours and human rights.

For Vygotsky's (2004, pp. 18–19), emotional signs and images are associated with and 'induce actual emotions and moods'. Joining the discourse of the happy childhood memory, 'colour therapy' was brought up in the captions of all installations. In a light and humorous manner, captions such as 'Colour therapy at #kiasma 🤍 🤍🤍🤍🤍' and 'Colour Therapy for Thursday 😳 [. . .]' suggested the colours and colour therapy would have a healing and renewing effect on the visitors and their health – and, hence, perhaps, flirted with this kind of New Age consumption of the self (see Rindfleish, 2005). The therapy talk was also present in the expressions of ambivalent emotions towards *vocabulary of solitude*, when some people referred to coulrophobia, the fear of clowns, and connected this dread of clowns with their childhood.

Places, environments and objects aimed at children are often colourful. Childcare centres, kindergartens and schools are often painted in vivid colours and decorated

with bright objects. Primary colours – blue, red, yellow and green – are used for babies' and toddlers' toys. The installations and exhibitions relied on bright colours to induce emotions – mostly emotions of happiness – which became the basis for Instagrammable environments in which the visitors positioned themselves as happy 'children'.

Playfulness: no play makes Jack a dull boy

All the installations worked as props for Instagram performances. People acted freely, spontaneously and instinctively around and with the works of art (see Figure 7), which radically differs from the traditional training of a museum visitor having to tiptoe through the exhibitions, where in the recent past 'photography was prohibited' (Bishop, 2012; Burness, 2016, p. 95). Of course, the character, the essential features and the physical arrangement of each installation provided some structure for people's actions and movements. The psychedelic *Graffiti Nature* solicited people to take part: to wave their hands, to shape the unfolding of the visualisations, and to use crayons to colour geckos and lizards (reptiles could be scanned, projected onto the artwork and finally, chased and trampled on by other visitors) (see also Figures 1 and 2). *Nervescape VIII* invited visitors to circle around the hanging nerve cells and then touch them gently as if they were 'a shy old

Figure 7. Playing together with the clowns. A photo taken with the clowns of *vocabulary of solitude* (2014) and the rainbow painting *achtundzwanzigsterjunizweitausendundsechzehn* (2016). Illustrative example taken by exhibition visitors. Image courtesy of the copyright owner.

mammoth'. *Vocabulary of solitude*, for its part, led people to zigzag through the art spaces so that they would not step on the meditating clowns, enjoying their serenity on the floor.

Theatrical dramatisation and staging related to play are common forms of children's creativity. The attractiveness of drama emerges from the child's possibility to be an actor, drawing on both imagination and actual experiences (Vygotsky, 2004). However, play is an ordered activity with certain rules the player has to accept and follow (Huizinga, 1949). The art installations on which I obtained data offer themes, ideas, and experiences to perform and act with. For example, people posted photos of themselves doing a painting movement with one's hand in front of *Graffiti Nature* and acting as an artist contributing to the artwork (see Figure 1). Likewise, Riina did some comedy when trying to recreate the viral *Leaning Tower of Pisa* photo out of the hanging parts of *Nervescape VIII*. Arto jokingly told on Instagram chat that he is a clown himself and wanted to show it by mimicking a *vocabulary of solitude* clown's posture. To be alone in the exhibition without anyone to take their photo was not a limitation to acting in front of the camera: for instance, one person carried a selfie stick when walking beneath the neon-coloured tentacles of furry *Nervescape VIII* and, without lifting their gaze from the screen of the smartphone, explained to the audience what was going on. Visitors made substantial use of the installations, the space and their imagination to perform and create photos and videos at the exhibitions, while also following the (new) rules of the exhibitions and the museums.

The installations opened the doors to the 'other worlds'. In ludology, play is considered to be an altered reality – that is, there is a boundary between the game and the real world. A typical way of understanding this is with the concept of 'the magic circle', which is an agreement between the players about the rules and the space of the game. Inverting this theory, Harper (2009) argued that people are fixed in their standard roles and hardly move between various magic circles in their daily lives, but playing transcends the magic circle and accelerates emancipation. Visiting a gallery with vivid installations formulates a magic circle differing from the spaces and routines of everyday life. There are similarities here to the idea of the portals of transformation in postmodern consumption experiences. Such portals give consumers access to fantasy worlds beyond their everyday lives and can be reached by, for example, playing video games, visiting Disneyland or going hiking in their quest for an even stronger experience (Price & Price, 2018). The immersive setting of *Graffiti Nature* was especially effective in transporting visitors into an alternative reality (see *vocabulary of solitude* in Figure 8). For instance, Aada explained on Instagram chat that *Graffiti Nature* had an escapist effect on her, as '[t]he moving artworks made my mind calm down and I sort of got into a different world'. On-site at the Amos Rex Museum, Marja announced that 'It felt in that room a bit as if I was part of that artwork!' And in her brief interview, Leena said that '[. . .] I could say I felt [like] entering into art because the installation was projected on walls, floors, and ceilings'.

Not only a magic circle was created, but also the visitors experienced themselves differently in this different reality. In some contexts, this immersion in other worlds and escape from everyday life is interpreted as a 'flow experience' (Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson, 1990), in which an aesthetic experience – or ludic action requiring concentration and full attention – causes a temporal state of detachment from time and emotions which results in a sense of personal development. The development of the new self in relation to immersion in the exhibition is clearly identifiable in the visitors' accounts above.

Figure 8. Hanging out with the clowns and becoming a part of the installation. A photo taken with the clowns of *vocabulary of solitude* (2014) and the rainbow paintings *vierzehnterseptemberzweitausendundfünfzehn (*2015) and *achtundzwanzigsterjunizweitausendund-sechzehn* (2016). Illustrative example taken by exhibition visitors. Image courtesy of the copyright owner.

Childhood is the time when creative processes flourish. To actively build a new reality, children combine, construct and reproduce perceptions and impressions (Vygotsky, 2004). The building of own reality and acting in it was very visible in the posts on Instagram. Although nerve cells were the actual theme of *Nervescape VIII*, many people mentioned 'fuzzy worms' and sometimes even the willingness to live with them in their captions: 'my furry friend 🐛 😵' and 'I wish I could move in that wonderful world of fuzzy worms 🐛[…]'. Furthermore, in various wording, the artwork was described as 'Cotton candy heaven 🍬', referring to the fluffy sugar treat typically enjoyed in amusement parks. In some cases, people gave names to the clowns of *vocabulary of solitude* they were sitting next to, and, for instance, told made-up stories of spending time with a friend who has escaped from the circus. Some people utilised well-known tales: *Alice in the Wonderland* was mentioned when describing the magical experience with *Graffiti Nature*. People considered their experiences based on their personal impressions and portrayed them as either a visit to an enchanting fantasy world or just a different reality they were living in at the moment.

Social relationships and connections played a big role in these playful adventures. People came to these exhibitions mostly with their friends and families. Social interaction is a key factor in forming the art exhibition experience (Vom Lehn & Heath, 2016). In the museum context, socialisation – the process in which a person learns the values, norms and behaviours of a group – is seen to ensure the appreciation of the artworks (Jafari et al., 2013). These interactive and participatory installations made it possible for people to play together and create energetic and emancipative connections with each other (Harper, 2009). Interestingly, social connections were not restricted to humans only. As mentioned above, *Nervescape VIII* was interpreted and experienced as a fuzzy worm or an old mammoth. People stayed in the realm of living organisms but stretched the species'

Figure 9. Mimicking a clown's posture. A photo taken with a clown of *vocabulary of solitude* (2014). Illustrative example taken by exhibition visitors. Image courtesy of the copyright owner.

limits for their own ludic experiences and expressions. In art exhibitions, a visitor's inter-action with other visitors not only plays a role in the formation of their experience of art but also their behaviour onsite. For instance, the time and manner spent looking at an artwork are sometimes copied from others (Heath & Vom Lehn, 2004; Vom Lehn et al., 2001). Children's play tends to incorporate a great deal of imitation (see Figure 9) – kids imitate and mimic things they encounter and reproduce those perceptions (Vygotsky, 2004). People presented the *vocabulary of solitude's* clowns as their friends and mimicked the clowns' postures. Also, just as children find the vulnerability of cute and furry teddy bears attractive (Valtonen, 2016) and anthropomorphised Toy Story film merchandise toys identifiable (Lanier et al., 2013), people found a similar sensibility in the furry nerve cells or the harmless clown statues. This was strikingly similar to kids playing with their toys as if the toys were alive, spending time with their imaginary friends, or meeting, for instance, Mickey Mouse at Disneyland. In other words, people actively adopted a magical world-view that is typical of children.

Discussion

The substantive contribution of this article is to illuminate in detail the formation of consumer subjectivity in the context of art exhibitions and social media. As discussed in the previous sections, the elements of imaginativeness, emotiveness, and playfulness – deeply intertwined with the development of creativity in children – allow a consumer to become a 'creative child'. Below, this child version of the consumer self is discussed more broadly to contribute to our understanding of the contemporary consumer, consumer creativity, therapeutic consumption, and other contexts in which becomings may emerge.

Raising the 'creative child': consumer creativity on social media and in artistic environments

Becoming a 'creative child' requires favourable circumstances. The 'creative children' produced in the context of the three exhibitions are 'birthed' and 'raised' in the hybrid context of the commercial, gamified, and social environment of social media (and, of course, immersive art installations attended to below). The Instagram app is heavily structured by the various achievements one might accomplish – such as a high volume of likes, comments, and followers – to keep the users engaged. The number of likes undoubtedly indicates the success of a post, and in many cases, the posters felt that these art installation posts received attention. The affordances and features of the app 'raise' the 'creative child', or in other words, make it possible for this becoming to take place. Moreover, the constraints of creating posts with the app features and the (unuttered) conventions and characteristics of successful posts could be seen to motivate consumers in their creative tasks (see Dahl & Moreau, 2007). In developmental psychology, the encouragement of parents, teachers and other adults is seen to have a powerful effect on the development of creativity, sometimes even more powerful than the impact of the actual talent (Mockros & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). Comments praising 'an eye for aesthetics' validate and socially reward the posters who are reporting on their exhibition experience. The poster does not have to be original; it is enough to know what works on social media (Schultz, 2005) – the app users are aware of the expectations and act to produce content accordingly, just as children know what their parents expect from them. However, creativity is in the 'eye of the beholder': parents do not necessarily expect much *actual* creativity (children's drawings are put up on the fridge door regardless of the talent). Deleuze and Guattari (1991, p. 165) cheekily note the same: 'We may also admire children's drawings, or rather be moved by them, but they rarely stand up and only resemble Klee or Miro if we do not look at them for long'. This social and gamified environment, formed between the exhibition and the social media platform, performs as a playful or even a magical sphere for the 'creative child' to appear in, while functioning as a parent praising and affirming the child so they may be more 'creative'.

Furthermore, the large and colourful installations provide an excellent ready-made structure for becoming a 'creative child'. Just as Dahl and Moreau (2007) note, constrained experiences with specific structures allow for more creative outputs. The creation of a stunning and high-quality art exhibition post is made effortless with these highly manufactured installations as ready-made backgrounds. The creative environment (already validated as such by virtue of being an art exhibition in an art museum) endows the participating person with creative power too. Of course, just as with children's drawings, these posts are not markers or proof of the person's creativity, but expressions of what is encountered at a given time and place (Olsson, 2009). The bright, colourful and candy-like photos follow the visual colour-coding of children's storybooks, cartoons and toys to the extent that these artificially coloured pictures could be seen to demonstrate a 'ket aesthetic' – an aesthetic separating the child and adult societies from each other, so that children may define themselves in their own terms and have their own world and reality without adults' rules and control (James, 1998). Even the emojis (e.g. hearts, rainbows, flowers, worms, clowns) used in captions follow this child-like aesthetic. 'Cute' Japanese design aesthetics, such as Hello Kitty, could be seen to help cling on to 'eternal youth' (Granot et al., 2014). By reproducing kids' aesthetics on social media, a person makes a distinction between themself and an adult's reality, which again

allows them to become a 'creative child'. So, if consumer creativity is seen as problem-solving (e.g. Burroughs & Mick, 2004; Dahl & Moreau, 2007; Hirschman, 1980, 1983), it could be said that people are solving the problem of finding a balance in terms of their simultaneous pulsating, open states of the becoming-child and other selves.

Becoming a 'creative child': connecting with the 'inner child' to reimagine a different adulthood

Therapeutic consumption relies on this understanding of performing certain emotions in specific consumption contexts (Higgins & Hamilton, 2019). Also, emotions are a crucial element in the construction of the 'aesthetic subject' (Venkatesh & Meamber, 2008). In becoming a 'creative child', this therapeutic ethos (see Lears, 1983) with talk about emotions, self-help mentality, and the understanding of art as contributing to wellbeing are huge catalysts for this particular type of becoming, deeply embedded in today's consumer culture. The will to be seen and acknowledged, together with the ease of this performance, is widely commented on in scholarship. There is a popular discourse concerning the narcissistic nature of selfies and other self-portraits on social media. Taking selfies is ridiculed as egotistic and frivolous (Goldberg, 2017; Iqani & Schroeder, 2016; Murray, 2018). Similar narcissism discourse is seen in the material gathered for this study – there were many ironic comments on the long queues in front of Amos Rex museum and sarcastic descriptions of the 'Instagrammability' of the exhibitions. It could be argued that some of these comments were plainly cynical. Cynicism is a discursive means for being critical and resisting normalised consumer subjectivity, and ultimately, can be used to construct an alternative form of subjectivity (Mikkonen et al., 2011). But arguing against the playfulness, some of the critics rolling their eyes affirm the position of a fully socialised and socially acceptable behaviour of an adult (see Alemany Oliver & Belk, 2021b) – an adult who knows how to behave appropriately at an art exhibition. This confirms that those who take photos and play are 'children', breaking the unutterable rules of middle-class behaviours in art spaces. 'The creative child' seeks attention, just like children who are egoistic in their need for attention – this makes other visitors react to such engagements as narcissism. This further affirms the proposition of the notion of 'becoming a creative child'.

The self is on a timeline in this context. A person has access to multiple selves, including the ones of their childhood. Whether it is a former self based on childhood memories or an imaginary child self – some have never experienced that stereotypically happy childhood when they were children, but of course, nearly everyone has experienced the rich inner world of children's imagination – it resurfaces in the complex net of immersive installations and social media affordances described above. Also, as Deleuze and Guattari (1991, p. 168, see also 1987/2014, pp. 342–343) note, 'We write not with childhood memories but through blocks of childhood that are the becoming-child of the present'. In a somewhat similar vein, it can be thought that, instead of some real memories, an archetypal child motif (or the motif of the 'inner child' in the therapeutic ethos, see Rohde Brown, 2021) and the general child-like mentality and worldview (Alemany Oliver & Belk, 2021b) work as building blocks of the creative child self. The allure of this self – or a becoming-child – is the promise of open possibilities and a bright future. In childhood research and the sociology of childhood, 'being' has referred to the

children's active construction of their own childhood, whereas 'becoming' has been more concentrated on the making of an adult – although they both can exist simultaneously (Uprichard, 2008). Moreover, 'childhood' itself is a social construct (James & Prout, 2003; James et al., 1998). A 'creative child' emerging here is able both to construct their 'childhood' (in the present, at the art exhibition with their smartphone in hand) and 'grow up' into an adult with endless possibilities – those futures opened up by a gifted and celebrated childhood. Growing up is not teleological (Hickey-Moody, 2013; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987/2014). Instead of staying on the level of daydreaming, this bears resemblance to the idea of consumers constructing their desired and imagined realities, and then proceeding to actualise them (Denegri-Knott & Molesworth, 2013). This ability to move from one state to another – even from the past to the future – is in tune with the notion of temporal social media selves that Kerrigan and Hart (2016) have put forward, with the exception that here, the existence of this social media self, the 'creative child', does not depend entirely on performance in the present. The becoming is rooted deeper in the past experiences and processes of a child's creativity, imagination, emotions, and play. Moreover, although some would interpret this whole phenomenon as a return to childhood, a form of nostalgia used to build a coherent and past life-story (Belk, 2000); in my opinion, it is not entirely the case. What happens in these becoming-child states is not only a construction of childhood, but an opening for a different future, a re-imagination of a different – perhaps a more creative – adulthood. Going back here means a form of opening up what is actually ahead.

Oscillating between different selves, the adult self (or some version of it on social media) may tap into 'the creative child's' experiences, outcomes and achievements. It is definitely possible to be strategic and exercise a self-branding type of becoming by carefully curating, showcasing and parading the acquired children's creativity and happiness on social media. This would follow the traditional understanding of the consumer self as identity performance and the neoliberal self-presentation motivations for posting selfies (Iqani & Schroeder, 2016; Kedzior et al., 2016). However, becoming does neither require nor is about imitation (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987/2014). At times, the presentations are subtle. In the participants' accounts, the multiple mentions of therapy, always in connection with creativity, strongly demonstrate the healing potential of the inner 'creative child' and the possibility of renewal, (re)development and transformation. Generally, therapy often guides the patient through a return to their past, and childhood in particular, in order to process its traumas. Therapy is an intervention in time, structured by specific rules, in order to achieve happiness and freedom, as much as – in a limited way – the immersive installations in question. In many cases, therapeutic consumption aims at self-realisation and transformation (Lears, 1983). The 'becoming a creative child' is aligned with, and perhaps possible because of, the social media ethos of becoming the 'best version of oneself'. As Alemany Oliver and Belk (2021b) discuss, consumer child-likeness could be motivated by the idealisation of nature and primitivism, and hence denote a quest for authenticity. This study finds that the therapeutic culture, its links with neoliberalism, and discourses of connecting with and healing the inner child resemble this quest. People have potential when they are developing, and a developing self – 'a creative child', even – is a very valuable version of self.

Beyond the 'creative child': other becomings and the market

Certainly, in our hyperreal neo-capitalist era of consumer spectacles, art museums utilise the blurring of the spheres of art and creativity and offer immersive installations to invite the becoming of different versions of the self as an ultimate must-have experience. Subjectivities are being produced and shaped based on the ideals of consumer society (Fırat & Dholakia, 2017). Art has always provided access to different selves, but these immersive installations are a safe bet – everyone has access to the vivid and magical world of imagination children inhabit. Along with the social media tools, the imaginative art environment invites an individual to participate and immerse themselves in the world of children's fun and creativity and even rebel against the dull requirements of inescapably always remaining an adult. Hence, an emancipatory interpretation, an escape from permanent and bland adulthood, could be made. This interpretation is aligned with the theorisations of the escape from the market (e.g. Firat & Venkatesh, 1995; Kozinets, 2002), given that permanent adulthood and the market are understood as similar aggregations suppressing consumers' identities, creativity, and self-expression. For Belk (2000), infantilised adults make better consumers. Definitely, art visitors becoming 'creative children' are great consumers, but as my data shows, they are not fully infantilised. In fact, they balance between different becomings, forms of creativity, imagination, and emotion, and negotiate the marketplaces of art exhibitions and social media. As Deleuze and Guattari (1987/2014, pp. 188–189) describe, 'No longer are there acts to explain, dreams or phantasies to interpret, childhood memories to recall, words to make signify; instead, there are colours and sounds, becomings and intensities'. The infra-structures of social media and art installations, together with specific aesthetic experiences unfolding in the exhibitions and online, create a possibility here for a temporal journey, renewed and renewable individuality, and a therapeutic sense of potential. Especially, the arts have tremendous power to unlock becomings of all sorts: 'Singing or composing, painting, writing have no other aim: to unleash these becomings [...] music is traversed by a becoming-woman, becoming-child, and not only at the level of themes and motifs: the little refrain, children's games and dances, childhood scenes' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987/2014, p. 317). Creating such possibilities allows for tapping into a perpetuum mobile of creative energy and offers lucrative opportunities.

It can be expected that other realms of the market will try capitalising on related opportunities. Similar, even if somewhat different becomings can emerge in other areas, contexts and markets. As Fırat and Dholakia (2017) put it, 'There is no limit(ation) to human imagination and, therefore, to the variety of subjectivities and organisations of life'. In the context of this research, the creativity incorporated in the activities and practices of social media content production and the artistic environment of art exhibitions and these particular installations are the formula to induce the becoming of a 'creative child'. However, it is for further research to explore what kind of selves consumers actually become in the moments of dancing on TikTok, flirting on Tinder or bullshitting on Reddit. It might not be as self-evident as one has thought – perhaps the consumer is not necessarily a coveted playboy on Tinder as, for instance, Belk (2014) hinted, but a little boy craving a warm hug. Playful, digital or creative contexts might not differ so tremendously from more mundane aspects of consumers' lives, especially if they are regarded through the lens of time: as a long becoming from birth, beyond the current configuration of the self and socio-cultural demands.

Conclusion

In this article, I have explored the nexus of arts consumption experiences and social media production practices, and how, through creativity, these specifically situated practices allow for the becoming of a particular version of self – the metaphorical 'creative child'. Based on an ethnographic and netnographic study of the consumption of three installations – *Graffiti Nature: Lost, Immersed and Reborn, Nervescape VIII*, and *vocabulary of solitude* – and the creative productions on Instagram, I show that art consumers enter a children's world. Here, the complex set of actions and experiences facilitated by the exhibitions and social media affordances yield an easy access to the elements of children's creativity. Imagination, happy and joyful emotions, and a playful and magical worldview are awakened and boosted. This experience gives birth to the 'creative child'. Contrary to the traditional understanding of consumers' social media selves as self-branding (Iqani & Schroeder, 2016; Kedzior et al., 2016), this type of a becoming might not be a conscious choice and strategically performed on social media, as the becoming of a 'creative child' is more than just a performance: the becoming can be very subtle, momentary, experiential, and holistic and might not be so easy to access. The creative child 'becomes' through the temporary glimpse as part of the *experience* rather than by decision or representation. Temporariness is also typical of play (Huizinga, 1949), and familiar to ludic, experiential consumption (Seregina & Weijo, 2017). This becoming is very attractive. It offers a possibility to imagine and live an open future with endless possibilities, even for a moment. Following the ethos of therapeutic consumption (Lears, 1983), the individualism of social media (Iqani & Schroeder, 2016) and the ever-evolving neoliberal selves (Fırat & Dholakia, 2017), the developing and free self without a predestined bland adult future could also be understood as a valuable one. Not, or at least not only, a setting used to infantilise the participants for maximum failure-proof profit, the exhibitions create momentary exercises in difference (from one's mundane self). Going beyond 'everyday' or ever-present creativity to draw upon child play and expression is a new experience offered to consumers-one that should not be brushed away, but understood in all its complexity and potential. In a broader market context, inducing these hyper experiential becomings is alluring to anyone having something to offer in the marketplace. Similarly generated but differently expressed becomings can also emerge in other contexts, perhaps in ways that cannot be entirely planned. However, offering an artistic environment and tools for aesthetic creation in the social context facilitated by technologies might summon the 'creative child' to appear again.

Notes

1. teamLab's exhibition in Amos Rex was the most popular, with 270,000 visitors and over 21,000 public Instagram posts (the number also includes posts made with other artworks displayed in the exhibition). Shoplifter's exhibition in Kiasma attracted 236,000 visitors and generated around 2,300 public posts. Ugo Rondinone's Kunsthalle exhibition got over 23,400 visitors and approximately 1,500 public posts. The data is received directly from the museums via personal communication. The museums used different metrics, and the number of posts varies based on hashtag and location tag uses.
2. The posts are publicly available on Instagram and can be found with location tags and museums' hashtags posted during the time of the exhibitions. However, the exact screenshots of the public posts used as data are not included in this article to preserve the anonymity of the participants of the study. Find examples of the posts here: http://www.

instagram.com/explore/tags/nervescape/, http://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/vocabu laryofsolitude/, http://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/graffitinaturelostimmersedandre born/. Please note these links are examples, the feeds change over time, and they might contain posts from other exhibitions around the world or material not related to the research.

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Iida Hietala is a Doctoral Researcher at Aalto University School of Arts, Design, and Architecture. Her research focuses on arts consumption and consumer creativity in social media environments, with a particular emphasis on consumer subjectivities.

ORCID

Iida Hietala http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6493-4628

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