

THE FANTASTIC FANATICS

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ABSTRACT

The fantastic fanatics is a multimedia compilation revolving around the themes of sports fandom and mob mentality. I set out to find the cause and correlation of fan behavior within sporting events. Additionally, I wanted to reflect my fanatic past and present demeanor parallel to myself as a creator and a photographer.

On the visual section, I set to capture the essence of fandom combined with ranges of emotion which occur in the stands and bleachers of sport's events. Using visuals, I highlight the contrast of the event with the spaces in which the event itself takes place.

Keywords: fandom, sports, mob mentality

TIIVISTELMÄ

The fantastic fanatics on multimedia kokoelma urheilu fanikulttuurista ja laumakäyttäytymisestä. Koko prosessini lähtökohtana oli etsiä syitä sekä korrelaatioita fanien käyttäytymisestä urheilutapahtumissa. Halusin myös vertailla omaa fanaattista mennyttä sekä tämänhetkistä olemustani suhteessa itseeni tekijänä ja valokuvaajana.

Visuaalisessa osassa lähdin kuvaamaan fanittamisen sisintä olemusta yhdistettynä siihen tunnevyöryyn, joka esiintyy katsomoissa ja penkeissä. Verrattuna niihin tiloihin, joissa tämä fanittaminen tapahtuu.

Avainsanat: fanitus, urheilu, laumakäytös

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INTRODUCTION

Hockey has always been an important part of my life, from spending all my free time as a kid at the outdoor rinks to fanatically collecting hockey cards of interesting players. Many of my most vivid and cherished memories as a child revolve around the game of hockey. I reminisce the moments at hockey arenas with my father, the dislike I found for the rival teams, and the sensations that accompany the devotees: dedication, excitement, and resentment — the circle of life for sports enthusiasts.

My thesis work is a cross-section of the organism known as fandom. The primary focus is on the fans at hockey games. I pursue to capture their behavioral changes throughout the match. The ups and downs of emotion

that transpire. Setting out to record the incidents that go on when people of a kin pack in together and how distinctly an outside viewer can witness the mob mentality.

My literary section offers a condensed glimpse into my past and present embodiment as a creator. It features a short narration of the process of finding my subject matter in conjunction with highlighting a few essential topics relating to the subject matter and myself. In the literary section, I also show the correlation I found between my fascination of fanatic behavior and my tendencies to also act in such a manner.

2. THE PERPLEXING BEING THAT IS JOHANNES



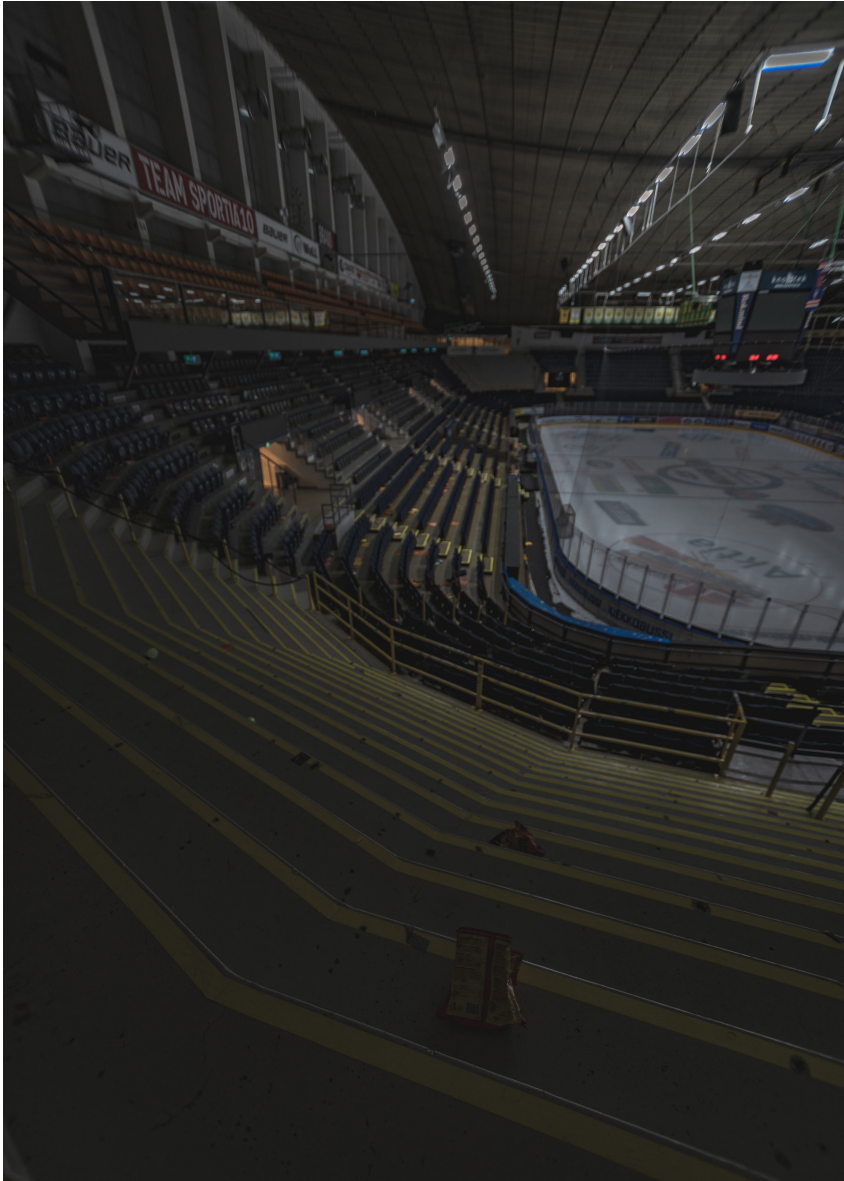


2.1 Background

Lawn chairs, small toy figurines from the Kinder surprise eggs, and weak attempts at macro photography. That is how the story of Johnographer began. I remember how I would take photos of the most random things. That is the start I had to photography. That is what piqued my passion for holding the light capturing device for all these years. Moreover, to not keep everyone confused, Johnographer is my online pseudonym on most platforms. It has stuck with me and gets thrown around even in real-life situations.

I have been taking pictures for a long time. The earliest memories I have of holding a camera are from when I was eight years old. The idea of an image getting burned into a strip of film while pressing a button was intriguing to me. I have been interested in technology from a very early age. Any device could pique my interest, and I was always driven to learn more; however, the camera captivated not only my interest but developed into a passion. It has changed so much throughout the years with drastic technological improvements and some fascinating attempts at reinvention. After all, it has remained a camera through and through.

Hockey has been my thing since I was maybe two or three years old. It has played a part in my life in one form or another ever since. Every winter I would go out with my friends on the outdoor rink that was just a few hundred meters from my childhood home. I remember doing that till I moved out on my own. That rink holds memories upon memories, from bloody noses to highlight reel dangles. It was THE pastime of the small town where I grew up.



I can't say I remember the first time I went to see a hockey game live. I wish I could, but I can't for the life of me recall said event. I can memorize numerous occasions when my father took me to watch the matches, especially the big rivalry games between the two local Tampere teams. They featured some unforgettable moments that I have kept with me over the years. A surplus of passion, pride, and emotion like no other event. The kind that you want to experience over and over again. And I have, as I have not been able to stray from the path.

Even after moving away from Tampere I have stayed up-to-date on my team and wear their colors with pride when I walk the streets. Nowadays I need to view them on the television and join the spirit from afar. It limits the experience, and I do find it sometimes hard to keep up the same intensity that I used to have when I frequented the games. The result of growing up on hockey has made it stick with me.





2.2 The creation of my content

I think I am quite spasmodic in my workflow. I tend to go on and off quite frequently as well as at the oddest of times. There are times where I am exceedingly productive for months on out with one subject but then counterbalance it with a couple of weeks of total disinterest in said project. On the other hand, the volatile state of my mind lets the creativity flourish at any moment and then I usually write out a lot, while struggling to keep up with my thoughts.

Within my workflow, the thought process is very methodical and calculated. I have inherited the engineer-like mindset from my father. Doing things right is very important and following a set of rules makes everything much easier and better. Though I try to vary from that path, I often do find myself coming back to it. It is also where I know I can find success and a feeling of accomplishment. Also, I have learned to distinctly recognize it, to push it to the side to allow myself to find creativity within my workflow.

Because of my spastic stage of progression, I have a hard time to find any visual references for myself. It may have something to do with the fact that I enjoy just doing my “stuff” and not taking too much influence from the outsiders. I want to create the visions I have, and in a way I see as best fitting. Of course, it is feasible to think that I pull some visual from mental images I have of work I have seen before. Or think I have seen something resembling the memory I have. However, I rarely if ever find for the sake of finding any reference visuals. May it be good or bad, but that is the way I prefer to go about my business.

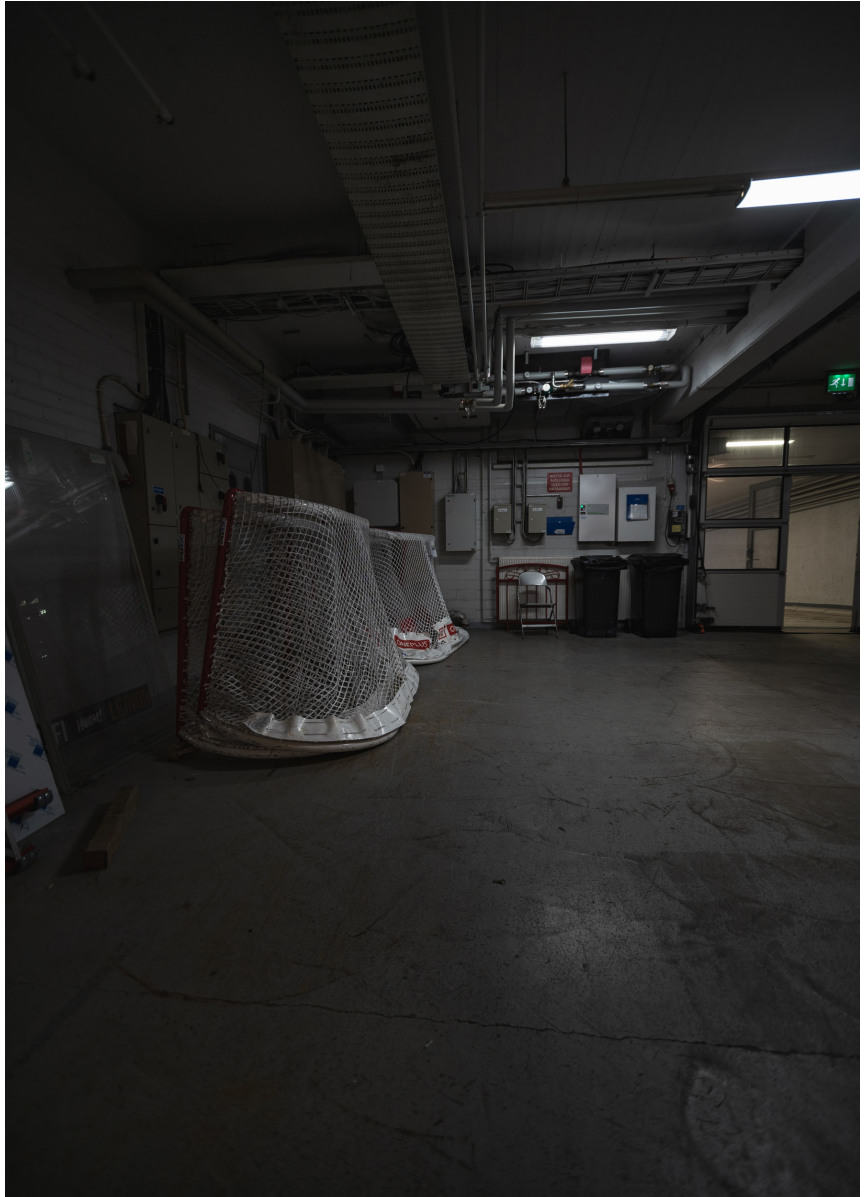


In recent years, I have shifted quite drastically over to the side of video work and cinematography. The longer I work with it, the more I find it to be a far more superior work format. It offers me more flexibility, and I have noticed that I can present my stories better in that medium versus using still images. Certainly, it could be argued that it is just the nature of video that allows it to show more, but I think it has more to do with suitability towards my style of working. The motion unquestionably compliments the work I prefer to create.

The timeline also fits my usual pattern. I have, unknowingly, established a particular cycle

for myself. I enjoy the versatility which the video format provides, allowing me greater flexibility in my content creation. I like the freedom this creates, enabling me to revamp many aspects of my work. The subjects, medium, and devices are all variables in an ever-changing equation. I even have periods that I will find employment from a field that has nothing to do with media. Latest has been a security guard position, which I enjoyed immensely. It allows me to learn to do a new craft while recharging for the job that fuels my passion. It keeps it all fresh in my mind and lets me achieve many personal limits, that is at least the impression I get.





I would still categorize myself as a documentarist. I enjoy capturing the real-life events a lot more than making up scenes and situation. The constructed productions are not my forte, but I don't steer away from them if an interesting one does find its way onto my desk. The actual events that

happen around us hold a bunch of aspects which generate a captivating aura. Like the fact that most of the details only happen once in any given circumstance. Then they disappear and are gone forever unless you as a documentarist can capture those unique splashes causing the moment to become immortalized.



2.3 Beyond the fanatics

When I was trying to decide which way to take this project, I remember stumbling across different documentaries and photo series about fans of music genres, skateboarders and inventors. Those were some of the first things that got me thinking about my life and the characters in it, repeatedly.

At first, I tried to avoid hockey as the subject as it seemed too obvious and unattractive to me. It made me feel like I was going the easy route and it didn't feel worthy of the weight placed onto the final project. I was convinced that it needed to be bigger and have more flair. Didn't help that sports photography, as such, having been done a thousand times and in every way imaginable. The sports viewpoint didn't seem to have the "it" factor.

As I slowly gave in to the instinct, I started to explore the possibilities within the sports field and different views and perspectives with which I could start. I was looking for something to deviate from the usual crowd of sports photography. Then I somewhat stumbled into looking at myself and what I do. I remember my girlfriend

consistently telling me I watch too much hockey and spend way too much time on the hockey-related news sites and forums. I tried explaining my reasoning and the nuances that accompany the fandom but to no avail. Then I remember thinking that if only I had video evidence or video diary to demonstrate everything that is happening. That is when I shifted my sights on the fans instead of the actual game, from the events inside the rink to the festival that is happening on the seats of the arena.

The spotlight moved on to the fans, the fandom, and this whole side culture of the sporting world that is so strongly present, yet almost exclusively comes up only when there's something negative to write about them. I started to study the fan culture from an observer's point of view



instead of my usual standpoint of being a fan. Coming out of the bubble gave me an opportunity to distance myself from the subject, and in doing so, I could present a more objective view of the scene. I started to gather information about fan clubs and their activities. I looked for interested partners

and groups that could provide the means to create the work I envisioned. I set out to look for sports franchises and organizations that I knew had loud, visible, and devoted fans. The kind that would allow a specific type of atmosphere to translate and transfer via the medium.

The format of this project came from a handful of different ideas. I had a thought to go down a very minimalistic portray of the fans. That would have left a lot to the imagination of the viewer, but would not have demonstrated the atmosphere correctly. I believe, when presented in this minimalistic manner, many holes would have been left in the story allowing for misinterpretation.

I chose video specifically since I felt it served the purpose of the project the best. I could show a wide array of feelings the way they mostly show up during the events. It allowed for a more realistic exhibit of the developments of incidents within the stands and bleachers. Not

to mention capturing the precise moments and the subtle changes in mood inside a split second. I wanted to showcase the rollercoaster of turmoil which happens without much notice from your average viewer.

After experimenting with a few different form factors, the idea of mixing slow-motion and normal speed video into one body of work created a balanced product. It truly represents the speed of the game and instances inside the sporting events while allowing to reveal and highlight the microexpressions which get generated in the heat of the game. They are also often magnified in the game environment.

As with all my work, the process with this subject was relatively irregular. I would have very motivated weeks and then very lethargic weeks. During the former, I would nail it. I found an abundance of time to work on perfecting the work and capturing more of it. I constantly had the motivation to create and follow up on the topic. In contrast to the latter when I found it nearly impossible to have time even to open the document let alone pick up my camera. Everything else in life seemed more exciting and more motivating than any piece of the thesis work.

This type of flow, or lack thereof, was not very concerning for me, as since the beginning of my time at university I have become very familiar with my particular work method. I trusted my instincts, as I knew that my creativity would again be inspired, leaving plenty of time to finish the project properly without needing to rush.



3. ESSENTIALS OF FANDOM





3.1 Sports fandom

An abundance of variables and environmental factors play a part in one's formation into a fan of a specific club or organization. One prominent determinant is geographic location, considering that in most cases people tend to choose their hometown team. Another one is the role of family members and significant others. Children often find themselves supporting the same teams as their parents almost as if it were a family tradition to support

that team. Partners who previously haven't found allegiances might find one with their partner's squad of choice. These are just a few different factors behind the phenomena as the research by Hirt and Clarkson (2011) shows. The research pushed further to show a correlation of individual, usually a star, players pulling in and maintaining fans. Additionally, organizational history and success play a part in the fan attraction process.



For some, it's a safe place where they feel part of something. Feel a sense of belonging and kinship within the organization. The emotions lived and discharged make life worth living. Those emotions are what you remember for years to come. To be more precise, you remember the split-seconds that are relished in those moments — the good and the bad, the ups and downs. You vividly remember the bitter losses and gut-wrenching failures. The emotional whirlwinds of big games won and bigger games lost. The passionate

amping up of a long season that bursts out in the most soul breaking ways possible at the end of the season. That leaves you empty and hollow. Still, you pull out the gear next season and do it all over again. What was the definition of insanity again? Doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different outcome. But hey that is what sports fandom is mostly about, insanity. The insane love of the game and the overflowing passion for certain color combinations that feel unique to oneself.

There is also a clear divide within the fan groups. You have your hardcore fans and then the more casual fans. There are those who stay fans throughout the years and religiously follow on the team. Then there are the fans who sort of shift from watching each game to missing some while other activities in life take over. The casual fan isn't too heartbroken to miss out on games. Life goes on. At the other end of the spectrum, the group of fans who praise and take pride in their fandom are hard-pressed to find any reason to miss a game.

One clear distinction between fans, or what type of fan you are is the frequency you visit the events, but even that isn't flawless. According to Hirt and Clarkson (2011), a pivotal measuring stick among fans which they love to use is the knowledge of the game. They compare their possessed knowledge of the players in the league, the game and its rules overall and how well they could predict a specific player's performance throughout the season. The competing is as fierce as on the field. Everyone is out to prove themselves and boast about their alleged superiority.



3.2 The experience

One of the best feelings is when you have built up the tension during a series of events within a game, and you get to witness the success. It leads to seven levels of contradicting emotions that you are unable to describe or express, so you yell. You yell and scream until your lungs give out. That stage of trance or euphoria is so fulfilling that it can carry on long after the match ends. Those are the moments that fans live to witness and experience. You hope that your team creates these moments for you as often as possible. The more high-event matches generate a craving for more entertainment. That is the sort of

success you build on to create loyal fans. It is very rare for a dull-yet-successful team to maintain a following. Unless of course, they have enough of history to demand the following.

Usually, regardless of how the last season went, you as a fan, go into the new season full of hope. So optimistic that new things await the team and always hoping for better things than previously. Like a gullible child, naively forgetting the past and believing what your parents say or in this case the team owners and management.



There are times that you are just too tired of the team and how they make the same mistakes over and over again. You learn to get a good feel for it and sometimes that leads to you turning off the game or leaving the stadium. You feel like your time is more valuable than the mediocre effort that is given by the team. It gets to you, and you get frustrated. The

human mind is a wondrous, albeit strange thing — building expectations based on imagination. You are getting disappointed by the scenarios you build in your head whenever they don't come true. It is the brain punishing itself because of the expectations it created itself. It is odd to be a part of and find enjoyment in this specific cycle. Nevertheless, you always come back for more.

4. THE SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY OF SPORTS



4.1 Scratching the surface

It is all about the unique experience that the organization or club can bring to an individual. The psychological effects and nuances within the sporting community are widely evident. Who does not have an over-the-top sports fan in their family or close friend circle? Perhaps maybe even have a small fan hidden inside them. It is quite clear that people do get affected by what goes on in the field or the rink. It awakes certain animalistic behavioral habits that we work so hard to suppress in our everyday life.



It is the rush of excitement and adrenaline that erupt in different forms. It depends on if it's from positive, such as a goal by one's own team or from negative, such as the opposing team scoring. The bursts can be yells of excitement, letting loose all the tension that has built up. Frequently the stands and bleachers are filled with seas of swearwords or in the worst cases, derogatory remarks. The strong showings of emotion like that aren't always from a hateful place, that is just human nature acting up in the deepest of levels. It is something uncontrollable that pushes out in the heat of the moment.

As the viewer, your particular association with the sport determines the level of emotion it awakes. A particularly helpful way to show the group mentality is with a look into

the shared opinions. You will quite promptly witness communal hate or at least dislike of a specific player within the fans' own team. Often a member of the team who usually isn't a notable player or expected to be particularly useful. However, they are someone who makes big visible mistakes from time to time, so people do pick up on that. So when that happens, it sticks for a long time, often until the player leaves the team. A big part of that process is that fans join in on the act without much thought or personal opinion. It just sort of comes with the "job" as if you are supposed to do that to belong to the fan group. Generally, such a player is known as a scapegoat, and that person is met with undeserved criticism. Often that happens in this setting as well.



4.2 BIRGing and CORFing


One of my main ideologies while working on this project has been the phenomena known as BIRGing and CORFing, the terminology as referred to in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology (Cialdini, R., Borden, R., Thorne, A., Walker, M., Freeman, S., & Sloane, L. 1976). They conducted several studies to determine the effects wins and losses had on fans, how it showed up in the supporter's life and what changed.

The ideas and methods shared in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology (Cialdini et al. 1976) got me to view the subject from a more psychological viewpoint to go along with the analytical point of view I already had from the personal experience. The perspective served as a starting point for the objective observation of the people engaged in the enthusiastic supporter activity.

Basking in reflected glory is related to the idealistic human need to feel belonging and finding self-worth in the achievement of others. The team and its colors unite people. They adopt them as their own and proudly show off the belonging to the said community. As an individual adopts the colors and team as their own, they begin a journey. It is this ritualistic occurrence, transforming to the group and its herd mentality. If you took a cross-section of any fanbase, you would most likely find that within the group similar ideals and values are shared. Especially the stronger and more clear-cut opinions are what get internalized the quickest.

Cutting off from failure can originate from a wide variety of sources. Sometimes the disinterested performance and constant errors will make you, as a fan, want to take a break from the team. Your time is more valuable than their lethargic performance. There are also non-sports factors, such as how the front office goes about their business and how much they seem interested in the success of the club. If you start to feel that the people in charge aren't as invested or their actions do not correlate with their words, you might lose the passion for the team.





Cutting off isn't just for fair-weather fans, but even the most devout fans might wander off into the CORF-zone. However, the amount of negativity and losing it takes to move a fan into that path is different. Your average fair-weather fan might be bouncing from team to team between each season if their team of choice doesn't instantly succeed. The supporters of this kind are labeled mainly as bandwagon fans or bandwagoners for their constant movement from camp to camp. By contrast, it might take the die-hard fan a decade or more to sway into the despair.

That insanity or emotional overcharge is best displayed and discharged at any sporting events championship game or games. The hyperactive joy and losing control of the winning side and as contrast, the overpowering disbelief and sudden drop to the nothingness of the losing side are two very publicly visible hurricanes of feelings that take over cities and countries.



5. CONCLUSION

The objective was to create a cross-section of the prototypical sports fan, their passion, and excitement as well as outrage towards the game. The process was a balancing act between being a fan and objectively viewing the functioning of a fan.

If I were to continue this project, which seems like a plausible development, I would like to carry out a deep dive into additional team fanbases. I believe it would lead to even more credibility towards the main goals of my hypothesis. It would bring about diversity to the fan groups and create more relatability for the viewers of this exhibit.

Another natural progression of this project would be to extend it beyond just hockey into a variety of other sports. That would hold considerable value in my eyes and be a move that should take this from a project category into a full body of work. The kind that could get shown off at big venues and should be the goal for long-term

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