Sensing Game Play.

Exploring computer game play in a game café and a mass LAN party.

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Abstract—In this article we discuss the sensory experiences of playing computer games by exploring the sight, the sound, the taste, smell, and touch of games. We reflect on how senses and the social atmosphere gives meaning to players' experiences of playing computer games in two co-located public settings, a game café and a mass LAN party. This discussion is related to a more general discussion concerning what it means to participate and play online and network games in a game café and a mass LAN party. The discussion is based on a field study in Sweden. We conclude by highlighting the different experiences of playing computer games and participating in those co-located game settings. In the game café playing computer games is a rather ordinary and mundane activity while playing games in the mass LAN party is to a large extent a sensational and extra ordinary event.

Keywords- *Sensory experiences of GAME PLAY, CO-LOCATED public GAME SETTINGS, Game café, public game play*

I. INTRODUCTION

I am sitting in one of the backrooms at Galaxy, one of the most popular game cafés in Stockholm. Around me young men are lined up in front of computers playing World of Warcraft, Starwars Galaxies, CounterStrike and Battlefield. The place is busy. People are leaving and entering more or less all the time. A young man enters the room and quickly looks around, as if he was looking for someone, before he leaves the room. I hear a boy calling to his friend to come and have a look at his game. Shortly afterwards I see a short blond freckled boy leave his seat and walk over to the boy who was calling. A young man in his twenties is returning from the front room. He takes a sip from his energy drink before he slides down in the empty seat next to his friends. Ok are you ready his friend who sits next to him asks. Are you entering? A young man is passing. As he passes one of the seats he says to a guy Hello what is up and gives him a gentle slap on his shoulder. The room is hot, despite the fans being on at full speed. A young man playing World of Warcraft is making himself comfortable in the chair. He is leaning back in the chair and pulls himself closer to the computer.

This example illustrates that playing games in a game café involves more than sitting in front of a computer in silence, with the mind focused on the game being played. Playing

computer games in co-located public game settings is not a disembodied, non sensual experience, but involves tactile, spatial, visual, sonic, and social experiences and are experienced through certain smells and tastes.

In game studies when the sensory experiences of computer games have been discussed these have often been conceptualized as players cognitive or perceptual involvement in games or explored as social psychological effects [1-2]. Central concepts are *immersion* i.e., players perceptual involvement in games, a sense of being “there”, *engagement* which is described as “appearing when a failure to overcome the problem at hand makes the player hesitate, rethink, consider or seek solutions at an increasing distance ... from the onscreen action”[1] and *flow*. Douglas and Harden [3] describe flow “as a state where self consciousness disappears, perceptions of time become distorted and concentration becomes so intense that the game absorbs us” Flow originates from Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1996) [4] to describe a state of mind and a feeling when everything is working “right”. Common for these perspectives is an assumption that various technologies are able to evoke the sensory experiences in their users. [5]

Ardévol quoted by Kerr et al [3] notes that cultural, social or ideological aspects have usually been seen as external factors that impose directions and restrictions to computer game play experiences rather than seen as components of the game play experience. Stevens [6] argues “that the mechanisms of play are products of people’s perceptive and performative abilities and of the specific physical contexts where they act and interact”.

In this article we discuss senses and the sensory experiences of playing computer games by exploring the sight, the sound, the taste, smell, and touch of games. We also describe the social atmosphere and reflect on how it gives meaning to players' experiences of playing computer games in two co-located public settings. This discussion is related to a more general discussion about what it means to participate and play online and network games in a game café and a mass LAN party. The discussion is based on a field study of a game café and a mass LAN party located in Sweden. In this article we also present a definition of the term game café and mass LAN party.

II. CO-LOCATED GAME SETTINGS

Co-located game settings such as game cafés and LAN-parties located at home, at students' dormitories, or a university campus, share some common features. These are real time events where people meet face to face to play computer games online or over a LAN (local network area). The emphasis on network games and online games excludes game settings such as casinos, or sports betting where the players have limited chance of affecting the outcome of the results of the games such as hazard games, black jack, or betting on horses.

The emergence of co-located public game settings such as game cafés or LAN cafes across the world is notable. In South East Asia, PC bangs, Wangbas and Internet cafes have been found to be popular places among youth to play computer games and to socialize with friends [7-9]. In Europe game cafes have become popular places for teenage boys to play games with friends [10-11] and escape parental supervision. Game cafes and LAN parties also have a strong geographical component to them, despite the fact that they are an opportunity for people separated by distance to come together. While formal statistics of game cafés in operation, how long they last and who is using them are not available (<http://www.caslons.com.au>) we argue that playing computer games in co-located public game settings such as Internet/game cafés and LAN parties is a growing global phenomenon across the world as supported by previous studies of the use of Internet in public settings [12-14].

A. Game café

In former studies of game cafés there have hardly been any attempts to make explicit the meaning of the term game café. We will use the international term game café in this paper, which includes computer game settings such as wangbas in China,[9]¹ in Korea PC bangs [7, 14] gaming centers in Sweden. The lack of definition is notable since there have been a growing number of studies of game cafés in Europe and Asia[8, 10-11, 15-17]. To be able to distinguish the game café in relation to co-located public game settings we will outline a definition.

A game cafe is a co-located public game place which holds stationary PC computers, broadband and Internet access, and a large selection of network and online games for a fee. A game café runs a cafe or a bar, stays open weekly and usually hosts less than 200 seats.

A game café holds stationary PC computers and usually provides high speed Internet access such as broadband. However in developing countries high speed Internet access via broadband is not always available, and dial up is used. The selection of network and online games is usually based on to the most popular game titles with reference to the national context. For instance at the time of our study 2005 and 2007 the most popular game titles played were World of Warcraft, DotA, (a modification of Warcraft 3), Battlefield 2 and Counterstrike. In game cafes multi and massively multiplayer games are by far the most popular games at game cafes since these games can be used to collaborate with friends.

B. LAN party

A LAN party can be described as real time face to face events that bring people together for several days of intensive interaction and play. These social events involve everything from file sharing and demos to game playing and other activities [18]. At a LAN party people bring their own computers. LAN parties vary in size across settings. There are the small LAN parties ranging from five to ten people usually set up at someone's home, the middle sized LAN with 100-200 participants arranged in sport clubs, scout clubs, universities, or youth recreation centers and the mass LAN parties usually with more than 10,000 participants set up in giant exhibition halls. DreamHack a massive LAN party held in Sweden two times a year which promotes itself as the Worlds largest LAN hosts more 15,000 participants. The mass LAN events have usually started as a small LAN by a group of friends and enthusiasts who like to share files, demos or play computer games but have over the years grow in size and activities and evolved into a commercialized event.

III. A SOCIAL APPROACH TO SENSES OF GAME PLAY

We use an anthropological and sociological perspective on senses. We are inspired by the sociological framework of Kalekin-Fishman and Low [19]. Kalekin-Fishman and Low note that the most intimate experiences are shaped by and in turn shape social structures and processes. In an anthropological perspective senses are not universal, but culturally specific [20].

Inner sensory experiences such as the sight, sound, smell and taste cannot be reduced to physiology or psychology but are shaped by the interactions of humans with their environment, and by language [19]

Kalekin-Fishman and Low [19] highlight the role of language for human perception. The idea of language was formulated by Sapir in 1929, a linguist and anthropologist who claimed that 'we see, hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose (us to) certain choices of interpretation'.

Inspired by JJ Gibson (1979/1985) Kalekin-Fishman and Low [19] argue that perception also has to do with the prevailing environment. The concept *affordances* formulated by J J Gibson is used to describe what the environment offers the animal, what it provides or affords the animal. They note that "perception is guided by the affordances and not by what individuals are exposed to". This idea suggests that sensory experiences and perception are not mere customs and habits but are invoked because of surrounding affordances and the available language.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The field study was conducted in a game cafe in Stockholm, Sweden between the years 2005 and 2007 and participating in a massive LAN party arranged 2006 and 2009 located in Jönköping/Husqvarna, Sweden. The study was conducted and designed by one of the authors Fatima Jonsson.

The description of the field observations are spoken of in the first person 'I', which refers to Fatima.

The game café Galaxy is one of the most popular game cafés in Stockholm. Fatima was visiting Galaxy regularly, about one or two times a week, during a period of seven months, between 2005 and 2007. Each time she stayed there between two to four hours. In 2005 Fatima visited Galaxy one or two times a week for 4 months. In 2007 she carried out a field study for 3 months. During this period she visited the game café regularly about 2 times a week, for about 2-4 hours each time. This makes a total sum of about 230 hours. Fatima did not play computer games while at Galaxy but used the computers to learn how the computers and network worked.

Fatima used first hand experiences, which means that she was smelling, listening and visualizing peoples interactions, the computer games and the social environments of the game café and mass LAN party. She added to her own sensory experiences with second hand data, by conducting 60 interviews with players and 3 interviews with the staff. She followed the standard procedures of writing field notes.

The field observations and experiences from Dreamhack, a massive LAN party in Sweden took mainly place in the main hall and hall C. The trade booth section where the commercial companies and various social organizations were located was left out in the study. Fatima participated in Dreamhack two times. In 2006 she visited Dreamhack Winter 2006 for one and half day and in 2009 she participated at Dreamhack Summer 2009 renting a seat for a 24 hours session. At these times she did not take any structured field notes at either occasion.

The data material also contains interviews with staff in a game café called GamingZone, located in Stockholm, during the spring 2011. Although ethnography is an established and common methodological approach within game studies we want to emphasize that our study of a game café and mass LAN party in Sweden extend beyond these specific cases and serve as relevant examples from which we can learn about sensory experiences of game play in social environments more generally by looking at what happens in these settings.

V. VISUAL EXPERIENCES OF GAME PLAY

Sight plays a key role for how we interact with games. When we play we interact and experience the games through our eyes. The shift from text based to graphical interfaces was a major change for the visual experience of games. Players could envision the virtual environments and/or themselves as graphic characters on the screen.

In the game café Galaxy and mass LAN party the visual experiences of computer games were not limited to the players' interactions with the games at hand but involved the experiences of watching the game play of other players. Watching the game play of others has been discussed as spectatorship in game studies. This term originates from film studies. In film theory spectatorship points to the relationship between the film and the viewer. In TV studies spectatorship has been described as less active than viewing [21].

As noted by Taylor [18] in game studies the concept spectatorship challenges the notion of agency being limited to

the player who is in control of the input devices. Studies of spectatorship in games have shown that the onlookers demonstrate a level of interest and experience engagement in games by watching the game play of friends and others [18, 22] [23]. Taylor and Witkowski [18] refer to Newman who makes a distinction between three kinds of games interactivity: fully interactive, partial interactive and non interactive (in the most instrumental sense as argued by Taylor and Witkowski). They state that Newman's classifications challenge simplistic notions of agency in computer game play by suggesting that even in single player games people may play together. It has also been claimed that spectatorship enhances positive feelings. De Kort et al. refer to a study of Jakobseen et al who state that the co-experiences of game play may enhance positive feelings¹.

In LAN festivals and game cafes people alternate between being players, co-players and spectators. In this article we want to extend the understanding of the notion of player engagement even further. We want to add to this notion the kind of spectatorship in which participants are walking around and looking at the game screens of others.

Walking around in the packed aisles full of computer screens and people playing is a popular activity at Dreamhack [18]. This mode of spectatorship, wandering up and down the aisles looking at everyone else's machine and set up resembles the activity of 'window shopping'. 'Window shopping' originates from the activity of browsing the windows with no intention of purchasing or buying the products in the windows. This activity can inspire new ideas and input for purchasing.

In this context this activity can be understood as 'screen shopping', which means that you are browsing the computer screens and the machines of other players. 'Screen shopping' gives people access to the players' lives, strategies, activities and interactions in the online game worlds and connects players emotionally to the games [18]. To walk around and watch the game play of other players is a pleasurable activity. At the LAN party screen shopping was afforded by the giant halls, the long aisles (feeling like you were walking down a shopping street) with thousands and thousands of computer screens to look at. In the game café screen shopping was also a popular activity, although the game café was on a smaller scale. People were often walking around in the game café looking at others' screens while they took a pause from their game play. In the game café it was common to talk and chat with the other players.

My own experiences of walking around watching other players' screens and game playing must be understood from a newbie's perspective. While participating in Dreamhack 2009 I was playing World of Warcraft with a colleague. The experience of playing World of Warcraft was not new, I had tried to play the game when it was fairly new but I never got caught up in it. Playing the game this time was almost like the first time. While at Dreamhack I was walking along the long aisles looking at the other players' screens when I took a pause from my own game play. My attention was primarily attuned to

¹They highlight that with whom you play influences game enjoyment and experience. There is a good chance of having warm and engaging interactions with friends.

the colorful graphics on the screens and the colorful and personalized decorations of players' computers. Usually I stopped when there was a game that I recognized based on my former experience or had nice graphics. For me as a newbie and for the visitors who do not play games 'screen shopping' was a pleasure similar to the urban flaneur conceptualized by Baudelaire. Rojek (1995) quoted by Stevens defines being a flaneur as an exploratory pursuit of pleasure in the urban city [6]. According to Stevens quoting Baudelaire the flaneur is a constant seeker of impressions and stimuli. The flaneur pursuits of the city are only for the idle of curiosity with no intention of learning anything.

Newbies and non players were looking on the other players screens for the aesthetic pleasure, while for the skilled players and professional gamers screen shopping was used as a strategy were they were learning and getting new ideas and inspiration for their own game play. Taylor and Witkowski note that the games you look at can inspire you to reactivate your own sense and desire for play such as playing the game on your own computer. Moreover watching a game also connects you viscerally to your own embodied experiences of play [18]. Players were interpreting the games that they recognized based on their former experiences.

VI. THE PUBLIC SOUNDS OF GAMEPLAY

It is peak time at Galaxy. It is Wednesday afternoon at 4.45 pm. People who have left school and work have occupied Galaxy. Peak time is the most intensive period of the day, when people have finished school, work and/or during lunch when people pop in to play for half an hour. Sitting on the bench in the backroom I could hear a boy calling to a friend some seats away to come and look at his computer. "Come, you must see this". Another group of players who were logged into Battlefield 2 were involved in a discussion about where to go and what weapons to buy. I could hear another boy shouting out loud with an upset voice "Nooo, fuck. Shit. What are you doing?" In the loud speakers a guitar riff was sounding in the background. A group of players were clapping their hands, yelling, YES! Another boy was constantly commenting his actions in the game for his friend who did not seem to be listening. Later in the evening the soundscape at Galaxy has shifted. Many seats are empty. People are talking with low voices. In contrast to earlier in the day I was able to hear the well known roaring sounds from fans and processors, fingers tapping on the keyboards, clicking sounds from the players interactions with the mouse, and bodily sounds such as burps, coughing and sneezing. The heavy metal music in the loudspeakers did not seem to disturb or interrupt the players' concentration.

When playing games in a game café people can not escape the public sounds of other players such as screaming, shouting and yelling, clapping, hands and verbal talk. These sounds could not only disrupt or enhance the game play experience but also the experience of the environment. One of the informants Ludwig did not appreciate the sounds of the other players, as he told me:

Ludwig: Games are played to relax. To get away from school and difficult things.

Fatima: Do you get annoyed or disturbed when other players are screaming and yelling?

Ludwig: It depends. If someone is yelling and I am tired.

Fatima: What do you do? Do you ask them to be quite?

When I asked him if he had asked the players to lower their voices he said: No I leave them alone. They have a life of their own.

When games are used to get away from work and school and everyday problems the screams and yells of other players was perceived as noise. These public sounds become distractions not only to his game play experience but to his consumption of the expected relaxed atmosphere at Galaxy. In this setting screaming, shouting and yelling were accepted. Only on a few occasions during my stay at Galaxy could I hear the staff ask players to dampen their voices when they were screaming. These sounds, that would be considered noise in other public settings for instance libraries, cafes and cinemas, part of the social atmosphere in this context and therefore not considered to be noise by the staff. Screaming and yelling expressed players emotions and engagement in games. Their engagement created and defined the social atmosphere of the game café. As such the atmosphere in a game café is reminiscent of other public sporting events where the audience is emotionally involved in the game play. At these public events the audience involvements in the game play creates the lively and intensive atmosphere in these settings.

Music is a central feature that define the atmosphere at Galaxy, GamerZone and Dreamhack. At Dreamhack techno music was often played at high volume, which intensify the feeling of being at a club and dance party. The fact that techno is popular within the game culture might be explained by the fact that techno music is electronically produced music.² At the LAN party the beat from the techno music surrounded the entire environment and it also influenced players' experiences of playing computer games. The techno music gave a dance beat and a rhythm to the game play while at Galaxy and at GamerZone the beat and rhythm of the music sounded differently. At Galaxy the most common music was hard rock and metal while at GamersZone rap and hip hop was the main category. These music genres differentiated the co located game settings and atmospheres from each other. One of the staff at the game café GAMEZone told me that the music was central for the atmosphere:

Fatima: Do you always play music?

Andreas: Yes we always play music. Otherwise it becomes really quite here. It feels like you are sitting in a library. It makes for a boring atmosphere.

This example suggests that the music is a central component for the idea of the game café as a social space. The

²Techno music uses and exploits all the computer generated forms of digital arts including desktop and electronic publishing, computer graphics and animations. Techno enables people to create a variety of new elements and sounds quickly and easy.

atmosphere of the game café was constructed as opposed to the idea of the library, understood as quite and boring. In contrast to the library the game café was supposed to be lively, engaging and fun where music played a central role for creating that kind of atmosphere.

In all these settings, music was used to enhance and support game play experiences. At Galaxy the metal music was played at a low volume in the background to not disrupt players' experiences as well as to enhance the relaxed and recreational atmosphere in this context. At GamerZone the sound of the music was higher and played a more central role in this particular setting. Rap and hip hop defined the atmosphere and gave meaning to players experiences of playing games in Gamerzone. While at Dreamhack techno music was central for creating the party atmosphere. We have shown how the public sounds "operate" in accordance to a value system based on how the sounds support or disrupt players' game play experience. Individual expectations, social norms and values and the social atmosphere evaluate these sounds as supportive or disruptive.

VII. EMBODIED GAME PLAY

Computer game play is not about getting rid of the body. It is very much a corporeal and embodied experience [24-25]. Co-located game settings such as game cafés and LAN parties allow players to play in the physical presence of friends and other players [26-27] and for tactile interactions and experiences with other people [19]. At Galaxy poking friends during game play was a common form of social interaction among friends. Gottfrid explained to me:

Fatima: Why do you come here to Galaxy?

Gottfrid: Instead of playing at home?

Fatima: Yes.

Gottfrid: I dont know. I think it is...(he pauses) I can sit here and poke him. (He pokes at the side of his friends legs to demonstrate what he means). You are being together but in a different way. You can talk online, we used to do that at home. Here, when you are here like this. It is another feeling. It feels like you are a small group of friends who are playing at a LAN at home.

In discussions about public relationships Stevens [6] notes that touch is both spatially and temporally immediate. He notes that "the richness and intensity of tactile relations accentuate the specificity of the person and thing encountered". The closeness of tactile experience with other people emphasizes interactive relations as opposed to passive perceptions.

In the game café people are able to touch each other, to interact physically, tactilely, corporeally. Players can easily reach out and pat each others' shoulders, arms and bodies during game play. This comment which is not unique for this boy highlights that tactile interactions allows for a different kind of togetherness than when playing online, and is experienced by closeness, intimacy and face to face interactions. Playing face to face affects how aware people are of each other's characters and moods[6]. Stevens notes that

these distances also determine people's bodily capacity to act. Hall (1966) as quoted by Stevens [6] makes a classification of four distinct scales of spaces between people. These is the intimate space, less than 0,5 m, personal, social, and physical spaces. These scales are determined by the kinds of physical interactions they can create. [6] The tactile experiences allowed by the form of game play at a LAN party comes from the sharing of an intimate space and the proximity of that act of sharing and from the establishment and maintenance of friends' interaction [6].

Poking friends does also fill an instrumental function for game play, such as supporting and encouraging each other during collaboration.

Fatima: What do you think about sitting so close and near to each other?

Matti: It is cosy and feels safe.

Fatima: It is Cosy and safe? Can you explain what you mean?

Matti: Yes, if things are going bad (he pokes at the stomach of Carl). You support each other. You say

"Come on".

Carl: You support each other. You compete against others.

Fatima: Is it really so?

Carl: Yes, exactly. It is like playing cards but modern cards.

By sitting near each other Matti and Carl could support each other verbally and bodily. In this particular situation the verbal supports online extend to corporeal and embodied support between friends playing games in the game café. Poking is a way to use the intimate space supported by the game café.

VIII. THE TASTE AND SMELL OF LAN

Smell can be perceived as a fundamental domain of cultural expression where the values and practices of a society are enacted [20].

"It smells LAN!" I heard this comment from a young man when he was entering the main hall, in the Bring your own computer section, at Dreamhack Winter 2006. He looked enthusiastically around while talking with his friend. This comment implies that there is a certain way of talking and sensing computer game play in a mass LAN party such as Dreamhack. LAN is not just perceived through the sight but also through the smell. The smell of a mass LAN party has a distinct odor which emanates from the thousands of people gathered together in a limited area, human sweat, burps, warm computer processors, stinking socks and shoes, the smoke from the air canons and people who have not taken a shower for several days.

The comment of the young man can be understood as the young man's personal translation of place. As noted by Kalekin-Fishman and Low [19] "what we absorb through the senses is the substance of our personal translations of abstract space into place and the location of our identities". His personal experience of participating in a LAN party was

recognized and translated through his smell. His comment may express an affinity with the place and the particular game lifestyle, the people who are there, and identification with the social situation that is central to the experience of playing at a LAN for several days and nights [28] as noted by Malone quoting Hannerz (1980).

His comment may also reflect an identification with the particular LAN culture, characterized by certain cultural markers such as not washing for several days, not going to sleep, staying up for four days and nights, eating fast food, candies and sodas. This culture goes back to the earlier hacker generations where programming code was subordinated other values and needs such as taking care of the daily hygiene and physiological needs[29]. The traditional LAN culture may be attractive to young people in Western societies in particular as it is a break from the everyday life routines of school, work, home and school allowing young people a relief from stress and the ordinary routines that characterize their everyday lives.

The smell of LAN was different in a game café than in a mass LAN party, because the game café was not organized as a four days event. However the attitudes towards cleanliness among the staff looked differently between game cafes. Galaxy was rather proper and clean. Although the toilets could be rather filthy, and sometimes were out of toilet paper the environment of Galaxy was most of the time clean and thus did not “smell”. However the staff did not emphasize cleanliness as a significant feature of this game café. At the game café GamerZone cleanliness was highlighted as a central defining characteristic. When I was asking Andreas from the staff to describe GamerZone he said: “We are the nicest game café in town. It is the most clean and fresh place”. At gamerZone the staff was making an effort to keep the game café clean. His comment highlights that the traditional values of game/nerd culture in this particular game café was challenged as cleanliness was valued and sustained as a significant value.

Does playing LAN have a particular taste and what role and function does the food have for the game play experience within the social context of a game café and a mass LAN party? Figuié and Bricas who quote Beardsworth and Kiel [20] tell us that food and the act of eating are at the point of intersection of intricate psychological, ecological, economic, political, social and cultural processes.

At Galaxy the menu consisted of fast food and pre-packaged food such as slices of pirogues and calzones, snacks, candies, chips, pre-backed muffins, carrot cakes, cinnamon rolls, coffee and tea, and chocolate bars. Two large refrigerators were filled with sodas and energy drinks. The café was reminiscent of a kiosk or a grill rather than a trendy urban café with Italian inspired healthy lunches and a wide selection of coffee and tea that is common for many cafes in the city of Stockholm. Fast food, candies, sodas and energy drinks characterized not only this game café but other game cafes in Stockholm.

The healthy and green lifestyle that dominates food consumption in Sweden, seems not to effect the game culture. One of the staff at GamerZone told me that they tried to sell healthy food: sparkling water and vegetarian calzones but with no success. He said that “kids want junk food. We have tried

to do our part but it does not work. When they come to a place like this they want the unhealthy food, this is what they want in a place like this”. The “unhealthy” eating preferences among young players in this context may be explained by the fact that the game culture has a long food tradition of eating fast food and drinking sodas [29]. Although young people may eat healthy at home, in the game café they want fast food, sodas and candies when playing computer games. Eating fast food and drinking sodas belongs to the experience of playing games in a game café. Young players’ food preferences when staying at the game café are thus shaped by the food tradition in the general game culture. From a game play perspective, eating habits can be read as reflections on how they support game play.

Fast food and candies give players quick energy that can be consumed instantly and does not interfere game play. Eating at Galaxy was supposed to not disrupt or interfere with game play. Players were allowed to eat and drink while sitting at the computers, despite the fact that the computers machines could get filthy and soaked. Most players who were eating at Galaxy ate during game play while only a few players took a pause from the game play to eat. Most young men and boys usually had dinner before or after going to Galaxy. While staying at Galaxy they ate candy bars and drank sodas and energy drinks. The dinner was often the turning point when young people had to leave the game café.

At Dreamhack the food culture and people’s eating habits are both similar and different from that in the game café. Dreamhack were serving fast food such as hot dogs, hamburgers, pre-packed sandwiches, sodas, candies and snacks. Some people left their seats to eat away from the keyboards while other players were eating at the machines. In this setting to take a break to eat was socially meaningful as there were other activities that you could do on your way to the food stance or after such as watching other people computer machines, computer games and stage performances. When leaving my seat with a friend to eat this procedure was similar to going out to have food, even if going out in this context means to go to the next hall to get a sandwich and a bottle of water. Dreamhack had specially designed sections for eating. We went to a food area where twenty or thirty microwaves were piled up for people to use to heat up their pizza or calzone slices which they got from a food stand nearby. The pile of microwaves for people to heat up their food suggests that eating in this context should be time effective and quick with no preparations.

In Sweden drinking energy drinks has become a trend among young people and is not possessed by the game culture solely. However in the game culture drinking energy drinks reflects social and cultural processes. As energy drinks are heavy on coffin and consumed by young people they have been target for discussions in the news media in Sweden. While we have not studied the potential physiological effects of drinking energy drinks we may suggest some cultural and social effects of consuming energy drinks in a game café and a LAN party. To endure the four day event, to be able to stay awake, young players drink energy drinks. In this context energy drinks may give players quick energy to be able to perform, play computer games and not go to sleep. However as Ben Malbon [28]

suggests in his study of marathon rave events: the use of drugs in a dance club is used to heighten the sensory nature of experiences, to intensify the sense of euphoria. "The intensity, tactility and the stimulatory experience may accentuate the effect of the drug rather than the other way around"[30].

The effects of drinking energy drinks may arise in the social context of Dreamhack. The party atmosphere, the professional competitions and the many thousands of people playing games may intensify the physiological effects of energy drinks rather than the other way around. In this context the environment enhanced the effect of the drinks. Contrary to the meaning and use of drinking energy drinks at Dreamhack, The experience of drinking energy drinks at Galaxy was different than at the mass LAN party. In the game café the consumption of energy drinks was used to relax rather than to get a kick and a rush of it and to stay awake. In this context energy drinks were mainly used for recreational purposes, to stress off and relax than for sensational experience and to party. This suggests that the effects of energy drinks are different in various social contexts rather than biological and universal. Energy drinks are cultural products loaded with meanings values, norms and identities.

IX. SENSATIONAL AND ORDINARY GAME PLAY

Game scholars with a sociological perspective have rightfully emphasized computer game play as a mundane and ordinary activity, an activity inserted into players' everyday life. We want to add to this notion that playing computer games can be thought of as an everyday mundane activity as well as a spectacular experience.

Participating in mass game events such as Dreamhack can be described as a "total" experience (cmp Ben Malbon analysis of clubbing [28]) as it is in effect a massive stimulation of players' senses and emotions. The many social and spectacular happenings in a constant flow, the spectacular light effects of neon light shows, the performances on stage, the professional game scene, the techno music pumping out through the loud speakers and the thousands and thousands of players gathered together for four days, make up its intensity.

Being a 72 hours event, Dreamhack share similarities with other marathon events such as raving [31] clubbing [30] and pop and rock festivals. Participating in those events requires players to stay up all day and night since people do not want to miss out on the fun that these events provide and because it is a significant component of the festival experience, to not go to sleep. This was also evident at Dreamhack. The participants with a four day pass were trying to stay awake as long as possible. Among some groups of friends this activity has evolved to an internal competition. If they fall asleep they may face practical jokes and "punishment" such as friends who would take their pillow, or putting tooth paste in their nose while sleeping. This notion suggests that participating in a LAN party is not only a demonstration of players games skills and competences but also a demonstration of players' cognitive and mental capabilities. Participating at Dreamhack is an intense, sensational and spectacular experience characterized by energy, adrenalin and emotions.

Part of the attraction of participating in a mass LAN party is not found only in playing computer games but to escape the many constraints of ordinary life. Participating in Dreamhack can be seen as a release from many of the social norms and customs of the 'civilized' social spaces in everyday life such as taking care of daily hygiene, conformity and stress.

Compared to playing games at Dreamhack which is an extraordinary and spectacular social event, taking place once or twice a year, playing games in a game café is a rather ordinary, everyday and mundane experience. The atmosphere in the game café is usually relaxed and laid back even if players can be intense, upset and emotional during game play. Playing games in the game café is a casual activity and used for recreational purposes, to hang out and have a good time with friends. For the people who go there on a regular basis, playing games in the game café unfolds within their ordinary lives. This is particularly evident for players who go to the game café after school, during lunch breaks, between classes and when they have some time off. Playing games in the game café are inserted within and organized within their ordinary life and not a spectacular event. For the people who visit the game café occasionally playing games in the game café is a social event rather than an everyday activity. As the game café is open daily it affords another game play experience than that afforded by the mass LAN party which takes place once or twice per year. Playing games at the mass LAN party is a sensational and spectacular experience while playing games in the game café is a rather mundane and ordinary experience.

X. CONCLUSION

What become apparent after attending Galaxy and mass game events such as Dreamhack is that the experiences and enjoyment of participating in these settings is more than interacting with and experiencing games. Computer games certainly play a major role in these settings but rather than limit the meanings and pleasure of participating in a game café and a mass LAN party to the interactions with the games at hand we have shown that the meaning and enjoyment goes beyond mere computer game play. When people are attending a LAN party and a game café they not only experience the online virtual game worlds but they are experiencing and enjoying the social atmosphere, the emotionally charged space [30] provided by these settings by means of the music, the food, people gathered together, and the many social activities and events going on. When young men go to a game café and participate in a mass LAN party to have fun, this fun is provided by the atmosphere and the social space these settings offers.

Participating at a mass LAN party shares similarities with participating in marathon events, such as pop and rock festivals, clubbing and rave parties. These events are rich of sensory stimuli, sensational experiences, and social activities. They provide young people with a place where they feel an affinity and identification with other people within that place and the social situation [30]. Participating in a mass LAN party is a multi sensational and extra ordinary experience.

The relaxed and laid back atmosphere that characterizes the atmosphere within the game café shares similarities with the atmosphere of the local pub. The game café, as the local pub

are used for recreational purposes, to relax, to stress off and to take a break from the requirements and constraints of everyday life. The game café also allows young people a space of their own [11] where they can construct and form identities and social relationships without the interference of parents and authorities.

The social mechanisms that make people want to attend a game café and participate at mass LAN parties are not new, or unique to these events. It is motivated by young people's need to have fun, to recreate, and to take a break from ordinary life. As such they are social places for hanging out and sensational experiences.

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