

Hockey Night in Toronto

Representations of Liminality and Violence

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Summary

I lived in Toronto for six months and consumed as much hockey as possible. I spent most of the time in various hockey bars and at Ricoh Coliseum where the Toronto Marlies play their games. My first intention was to get inside a hockey club, but since I soon would learn that my ambitions was a bit over my head I settled for presence in the large hockey community that exists in Toronto. I could literally find people that were open and interested to talk about hockey everywhere.

The focus in this thesis is hence the social aspects of consuming hockey, wheter it's watching hockey games in a bar, or at the arena. The social drama at hockey games is one particular interest. For instance I discovered a form of nonverbal communication that exists between players and spectators. This communicative experience is usually created through actions or situations that happen between players on the ice. Take the fighting for instance. In every game I watched were a fight occurred, the crowd become louder and clearly paid attention to what happen on the ice. A sure sign of a social commitment, a hidden bond or something similar, which makes it all more intense. Furthermore, hockey games seems to create an opportunity for a special atmosphere that separates it from other parts of social life. A prove of a liminal stage with losses of structure where peoples can experience something they might not be able to elsewhere (Turner 1988). This paper seeks to understand why hockey is relevant, why it's moving, provoking and engaging big crowds, and how this affects the those who participates.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Hockey is the fastest team sport in the world. The action you can observe from the stands are a highly interesting combination between physical presence and skill that seems hard to find elsewhere. One very defining moment in during my stay in Canada appeared when I went to see a hockey game with tickets at second row. Second row means that you can almost touch the Plexiglas that covers the rink to prevent the puck from going out of play. One of my informants, Tim, had gotten us free tickets and we were all excited. This was about to be my first experience with all the action up close.

Even though I was excited, I did not expect to be as overwhelmed as I actually was. The pace and intensity from this angle was just mind boggling. It's one thing to watch hockey on television, another to watch it live in regular seats, and a third thing to watch it up close. My best memory was when one of the home players checked the opponent into the glass, separating him from the puck, with brutal force. This happened right in front of us and I think some of us actually believed we were at the ice for a moment there. The intense combination of sound, physical movement in the Plexiglass and rink boards created by the heavy impact of two bodies, together with the face on the player being hit, made this a distinct set of visual pictures that to this day are stored in my mind. It did not change my view of hockey; it just made me discover how brutal it can be. The powerfulness in every aspect, a single stride or a slap shot. This made me enjoy the sport even more. A spectacle of excess, a very real battle, all in which body and emotion play the biggest part as Roland Barthes might have put it (1973).

I liked hockey before traveling to Canada, but my interest for the sport grew stronger as the weeks went by. The following story is told to paint a picture on how hockey can affect ones emotion both positively and negatively in matter of moments. Over a year has passed since it happened, but I still remember the feelings and circumstances around me down to details, even without looking into my notes. To start off I'll mention that I had grown strong feelings of a hockey club named Toronto Maple Leafs. I had seen plenty of games and talked to plenty of fans during

this shorthanded season in the National Hockey League. The calendar was displaying the month of May and the spring had finally arrived in the city of Toronto. The NHL regular season was finished and playoffs came next. Just as usual, except for one fact. Maple Leafs had qualified for the Playoffs, first time in 9 years. That meant a minimum of four games against the Boston Bruins, and at least two games in Toronto, in a best of seven-series.

Game 7 in Boston

I'm in a crowded bar in the heart of Toronto. It's warm outside so all windows are open to let air flow through the venue. People everywhere around me wearing white and blue jerseys are buzzing. Loud, ecstatic and passionate such as sports fans are portrayed to be when in a group. They are watching hockey, their favorite sport, in a country that holds the unofficial title as hockey nation number one. Same thing can be said about this city and the province of Ontario which produce more NHL players than any other part of Canada. It's the third period. 5 minutes and 29 seconds has passed and something that leaves no thoughts of pain and disbelief has occurred. Leafs player Nazem Kadri has shot the puck behind Bruins Finnish goalie Tuukka Rask, after a rebound on a two against one opportunity with Phil Kessel. This is the second goal of the third period for the Leafs, and "we" are up by 4-1. As the game is played at TD Garden in Boston the crowd is quiet, so quiet that I could hear the Leafs players screams of joy from the television. All mixed in with loud cheers from everyone in the bar, including myself. Oh wait, I forgot to mention a crucial fact, this is game number seven and the winner advances through to the second round.

The score is 4-1 with about 14 minutes left to play. The play-by-play announcer claims that the Leafs will need a collective collapse for the Bruins to stand any chances of forcing this game to overtime. "You just don't give up 3 goals or more in the last period of game 7 in the playoffs". With 10:42 left to play Bruins score. Patrice Bergeron is very calm and accurate when he snipes a wrist shot in behind James Reimer, after a powerful drive around the net by big man Milan Lucic. Reimer

is caught down in a butterfly movement and can't do much to prevent the goal. It's easy to spot how upset he is with both himself and his defense. The period moves along with sustainable pressure from the men in black and gold uniforms representing Boston. Leafs struggle to do anything positive while gaining back the possession of the puck and it usually ends with just dumping it out of their own zone to wait for another Bruins attack. The atmosphere is bizarre. It's very quiet and nobody is engaging in any form of conversation. A few people are applauding short and firm every time Leafs clear the puck, or if Reimer makes a save. Most people are paying full attention to the screens and not displaying a whole lot of feelings. I'm very nervous myself and can't do anything else than following the actions of the game.

With 3:36 left, Leafs Frattin creates a breakaway opportunity, when he forces the puck away from the Bruin defenseman Dougie Hamilton. Frattin blocks a shot/pass close to the Leafs own blue line, and since Hamilton is caught without moving his feet Frattin has a clear track all the way to face Tuukka Rask 1-on-1. Frattin dekes to the left and tries to put the puck in with his backhand. Rask reads his actions quick and forces the puck away from the net with his goalie stick, extracting arms and legs in full stretch in one impressive motion. A goal would be a definitive end to the match. People who got up from their seats are almost falling straight back down as the hope of a goal is crushed.

Two minutes left and Rask leaves the ice so Bruins can play with 6 skaters and an empty net. Play is kept around the boards with little or no possibilities to direct any shots at the net. Leafs try to create an opportunity for an empty net goal but loses the puck in the neutral zone (middle of the ice). Less than 1:30 left now. It feels to me like everything is moving in slow motion. Tension and stress levels are high and everything around me has disappeared into black. 7 seconds later the puck finds its way to the tallest hockey player ever in the National Hockey League, Zdeno Chara. A slovakian citizen that towers 2 meters and 6 centimeters over ground level. Add 116 kilos of muscles and you have a beast. Chara gets time to fire off a one-timer slap shot from the right point. Reimer gets his body behind the shot, but fails to catch the puck with his glove. The puck falls down

right in front of the Leafs goalie where Lucic has taken a position between two Leafs defensemen. Lucic's job is hence of the easy kind, and he banks in a shot over Reimer who dived after his own rebound. 3-4 and 82 seconds left on the clock. The atmosphere is still quiet and bizarre, but some guys did show some of their frustration through swears and disappointed body language. I feel like this is a big bad joke and can't believe this is actually happening.

Bruins calls their time out to gain back some juice in their legs. A smart and usual action as Coach Julien wants to utilize his best players for the final plays. Back in play Bruins win the face off at middle ice. David Krejci drops down to pick up the puck, carries it towards the Leafs zone and dumps it in around the boards for Chara and Lucic to retrieve it. They succeed to gain control of the puck and later set up good passing lanes which force the Leafs players to collapse in front of their own goalie. Puck ends up on Bergeron's stick near the middle front, with Chara standing right in front of the Leafs net. Reimer's view is by all means limited and that Leafs captain Phaneuf desperately tries to move the big slovak, by physical force, doesn't make it a whole lot easier. With nearly 50 seconds left Bergeron fire off a wrist shot that sneaks inside the goal posts up high. Reimer was left with no chance to track the puck or the where it was shot from. The audience in the bar is split in two. One half is calm and not giving away any reactions at all, while the rest of the bunch swears "fuck" following with different kinds of expressions and hand movements that I connect with frustration. I screamed "fuck" as well, while hitting the table in our booth with my fist closed.

Next 50 second passes without any goals. That gives everyone time for a short brake while the players rest and the ice surface gets a new layer of water to make it smooth and neat for the overtime period. Rules from now on are very simple: First goal scored earns the victory. If neither team scores in 20 minutes there will be a new break, followed by a new period of 20 minutes. This continues until someone put the puck in the net. For me this break was a bad news, since I had kept my focus on the current actions of the game there was no time to reflect over the recent events. Now all those things came at once and my head felt overloaded with emotions and questions. How could

my team let that happen? 3 goals in 11 minutes sounds way too good to be true, heck even two of them with an empty net! And so on, how on earth can the Leafs turn this around? I know it's just one goal, but still it feels like the ice is heavily tilted towards Reimer's net. In order to calm down I started talking with three friends who had joined me, but I can't remember any topics.

Game back on and I'm nervous, people around me are mostly quiet and focused. One guy shouts out: "Go Leafs Go!". Another guy follow up with: "Let's go boys!". Pace is high out on the ice, not many whistles and not a lot of scoring chances. Feels like a chess game. Waiting for the opponent to make a mistake you can take advantage of. Move like a tiger, sting like a bee. Bruins is better at possessing the puck. They play cycle around the boards and in the Leafs zone. The Leafs seems tired and they don't move their legs fast enough. The inevitable become reality. One goal that sends one city to havoc and joy, the other one to pain and frustration. It's Patrice Bergeron, again. He bangs in a rebound from his own shot after heavy traffic in front of the goal. Both Reimer and his defensemen tries desperately to get the puck away, while there's only one Bruin who gives them a battle. No one gets the puck away from the slot area and Bergeron gets to finish the game in style. In America that's called clutch. An expression to celebrate players that step up when things matter most and thus take risks to earn victories. The crowd on TV goes mad. Scenes of Bruin players jumping and hugging each other follows, before one can spot the Leafs players skate over to Reimer to give him a tap on his shoulder or padding.

It looks like people are in a hurry to get out of the bar, only a few stay put at their tables or stoles. After all it's Sunday evening and work is next for many people the following morning. I can't stop wondering what the Monday would be like if Leafs had won. I feel devastated, it all seems so unfair. When the match went to overtime, I was convinced this was going to happen, but when it finally did it was still a shock. One of my friends described me as a ghost, with no expression, and that I wasn't the only one. My friend said it reminded her of a funeral, just that everyone was wearing blue and white instead of black. She had never seen so many sad men and women no place else.

Hockey as a spectacle

Roland Barthes writes about wrestling as a spectacle. He describes how, unlike in hockey, that the intent of the is not about who will win or demonstrate some kind of excellence, it is a staged way of acting out society's basic concepts of good and evil, of suffering, defeat and possibly justice. He adds that the wrestlers are portrayed as characters like in pantomime, grossly exaggerated stereotypes of weaknesses in humans: the traitor, the conceited one, the effeminate teddy-boy etc. The wrestling match is hence a display of all this qualities, in contrast to the result focused sports games (Barthes 1973).

Hockey is also a spectacle, a word that per se is something that can be seen or viewed and possesses impressive and remarkable qualities (Barthes 1973). Though the outcome might not be important for the spectators of wrestling, it should matter more in hockey. Professional team sport is all about winning per se. A single result in a match is of huge importance for the participants, such as coaches, leaders and players. Hence teams are measured through the overall standings, and categorized as bad or good thereafter. Results obviously means a lot to the fans as well, but it's not always what seems to draw people's attention to the game.

A single hockey match have a lot of qualities as wrestling, where small battles during the match can mean something in them self. Fighting is a good example. It's the action of dropping the gloves and exchange punches with one's opponent that really ignites the crowd. My informant Tim once told me: "Winning the fight it's not the important thing. It's about telling your guys (fans, teammates) that you are willing to stand up and take a hit for them." One of the goals in this paper is to deconstruct hockey through single events and actions within the 60 minutes of a game. These experiences can give us better insight to why hockey is popular and why people enjoy consuming hockey.

Carnival metaphor

A match of team sports touches many different aspects of the social life. It has many actors and participants and hence has become a very complex field of study. Sports are in this way understood as a social world, a world where the boundaries is set by effective communication rather than its members, geography or other similar boundaries. In short a world that it is easy to access through different forms of presences and communication (Barthes 1973).

Carnavalesque is a famous expression used and theorized by Michail Bachtin, where the body, food and power are main ingredients. Bachtin created this theory based on medieval culture of organizing big costume parties know as a carnival. Today we can recognize events such as Mardi Gras in New Orleans, and the big carnival in Rio de Janeiro. The carnival has in by itself a lot of different qualities, but in Bachtins texts it's mainly interpreted as a collective world where the interaction between individuals is of importance. In a time where Europe was controlled by the Catholic Church and feudalism functioned as legal and military custom, carnival acted as a nonviolent comic critique to these forms of social structure (1984).

By utilizing body in terms which not included neither hierarchy or social norms and rules, participants exploited the grotesque qualities such as openings (anus, mouth, vagina) and penetrative organs (penis, nose) to create connection to the world in forms of sex, drinking and eating. These practices are hence connected to animalistic behavior, but also to renewal of life through lower parts such as the belly and the uterus (Bakhtin 1984).

Spectacle and carnival in the modern era of hockey

The modern and organized hockey that we recognize today was created when the game moved indoor. The hockey arenas created a controlled environment, but the most important part was the presence of spectators. Hockey immediately became a form of entertainment where people could enjoy the exciting action down at ice level, while watching it in comfortable conditions night in and

night out (Gruneau and Whitson 1993).

Recent years have however taken hockey games into another dimension: an ever so real rise for sports as a spectacle, with multiple new and impressive and innovative ways to attract people that otherwise would spend their money elsewhere. Hockey has entered the consumption business and the National Hockey League as a product per se, creates higher revenues with abilities to reach consumers on a global level. Many pundits and scholars argue that this was prompted when the game was introduced to unfamiliar markets, away from Canada and Northern USA, such as California, Florida and Texas. This phenomenon tells stories about local identity and symbols mixed in with the game of hockey for the sake of making the sport attractive to the Americans that bear little knowledge of this ice spectacle. Player's skating through a giant shark head in San Jose is one example. Sound technology is another example where rock or metal music create connotation to concerts or the more known boxing and wrestling (Kennedy 2009b).

Hockey's move towards entertainment has transformed it from a simple competitive game where fans had their attention focused on the ice, to something different that might remind one more of a circus or a party event. Even though players skills and abilities has continued to grow, it's the spectacle and the frame around the event that connects fans to the action on ice level in a whole new way (Gruneau and Withson 1993). When I make comparisons between the games I've watched in NHL and those I've watched in Norway, it's two different experiences. Better skills, more impressive technology and more people in the stands make such a huge difference. Hence it's tempting to draw parallels to the way Bakhtin describes carnival form medieval literature of Rabelais (1984). Carnival is not a spectacle seen by people, they live in it themselves. During carnivals no life is believed to exist on the outside. All focus is shifted towards acting and display where the subject laws are freedom.

In fact, much of the experiences one pick up at an NHL games is remarkably similar to the medieval carnival, with violent behavior, symbolic rituals and challenges of hierarchies. When it's game time, actions away from the ice is carefully scripted, just as the carnival. Anthems, music,

lights, interviews, half time entertainment, everything that creates a familiar and exciting atmosphere during games, goes down in a certain manner every game. However, hockey does bring elements that put one apart for the classical carnival. Abilities to act out of freedom are limited for the spectators because of concerns towards their own safety. The elements might therefore be of an imaginary kind. Each person that watches the game from the stands is performing their own personal carnivals through emotions.

Presentation of professional hockey has evolved ever since the roots of the game way back in the 1880s. The historical era was followed by to the “polite” era around 1950s and now a days hockey presentation is described as the “music and mascot” era, starting around 20 years ago. The historical era is not very well documented but described as a period where spectators would act eager but relaxed towards the action on the ice. The polite era that followed are described as men in suits and women in dresses. These people consumed hockey in a manner that draws connotations to the ballet and theatre, relaxed and behaved with calm applause when appropriate. The modern era is characterized by loud music and motivating videos on jumbotrons who tell the crowd to “get loud” and “make some noise” (Kennedy 2009b).

In this regard the carnival element can be viewed as a modern feature, but as a supplement rather than a replacement of the old habits. The older elements being violence and decorum, are still important parts of hockey games. All these aspects are today put together for the fans with the intent to both create a strong and emotional exercise, and an experience that will stay the same on a larger level no matter what happens down at the ice. In short this is a determined strategy that sport teams need in order to sell tickets and create a certain buzz around their games. This is a smart and consistent strategy considering the less predictable outcome of the live action in hockey (Kennedy 2009b).

Identity and nationalism

Collective identities and nationalism are topics that play an important role when we are discussing modern sports and consumerism. Both topics are heavily researched in both anthropology and sociology, also when they are related towards sports. Moorhouse amongst others concludes that sport is a social phenomenon with all its qualities, which exists outside itself. In Great Britain, soccer or football commonly used in Europe, has played a notable role in society all the way from the late 1800's. Football has since that time become organized and institutionalized like many other sports. The British had strong feelings towards football and connected the game with own identity. Hence the British Football Association claimed ownership of the sport when they were faced with the idea and will from a group of men who wanted to create an international association, later to be known as FIFA.

FA failed in the end and FIFA managed to create standardized values and rules that would count for every national football association. Even though FA lost the battle, its very interesting that a national organization tried to claim monopoly over a specific sport. As of today british football is organized by nations (England, Northern-Ireland, Scotland and Wales). In other words has football become part of a political mean where creation of national teams was a necessity for FIFA. This concept proves the difficulty to subtract both nationalism and social identification from sports (Moorehouse 1996).

Nationalism can thus be something which is created inside sports. It doesn't mean that nationalism is a product of what people think and how they act. It's rather how people express what they have experienced and furthermore how they view themselves through them. Sports can thus be used as an object for construction of excessive national consciousness, which the state itself could struggle to maintain it's legitimization. A certain consciousness like this one, can mobilize bigger parts of society in a very effective manner, if the focus lies in activities that was established around patriotic values. To summarize, it's the activities in themselves that ensure the socialization of the individuals, which can lead to mobilization of large units towards a desired confrontation. This is

easily connected to war and the likes of young men's will to fight behind a common goal. In this perspective, sports represent a public celebration of the endless and ruthless battles, in societies that are built around pacified institutions (Faure 1996).

Such a quality is often, and easily, connected to masculinity. A term that often is used when describing collective groups where men compete, such as a hockey. The traditional form of masculinity is to create men out of boys. A common process in most societies and therefore very relevant for Canada. The history of British boarding schools, where education is strongly connected to participation in various sports, is a good example. Students are meant to experience the values of comradeship, team work and extensive control over their own bodies (Moorhouse 1996).

In hockey one could perhaps add one certain element to the framework, violence. Even though this element might be communicated too much by the media, by example, it's still a part of the game. If we call it physical play instead we can add body checks and blocked shots to make it a more relevant term. The rough style of hockey seems to attract both fans and pundits, though every action has a certain boundary. When a player crosses those boundaries it catches a lot of negative attention. In this light hockey can be portrayed as a culture that glorifies aggressive attitudes and violence (Gruneau & Whitson 1993).

Eduardo Archetti challenges this notion after a research project in Argentina. His sources were soccer and tango. Throughout Argentinian soccer history, masculinity has been associated with individuals displaying impressive creative actions on the field. Such as a dribble, pass or shoot. National Argentinian values are hence produced by tradition rather than warlike motivations that Faure wrote about. A strong contrast to discipline, toughness, teamwork and efficiency (Archetti 1996).

A relevant example to illustrate such thoughts about masculinity in Toronto is Maple Leafs winger Phil Kessel. The young American earns his pay checks by scoring goals and provide assists, one important trait when playing the game of hockey. What's interesting about Kessel is the divided opinion about him. If you take the five past seasons, only three players have scored more goals in

the NHL. This doesn't stop fans from criticizing him for being lazy defensively, overpaid and a bad team mate. That Kessel doesn't like to share of his private life seems to put fire to the fuel. Kessel new contract is a proof that Leafs management believe in his abilities on the ice, masculine or not.

Defining games as a concept

Sports is usually defined as a game in anthropological research. Games as a phenomenon are widely discussed and hard to pin down to a simple definition. Some writers claim that games is a universal quality in mankind, and furthermore that games can be connected to everything we do. In other words those games are everything we do to acquire benefits over others. This definition is highly blurry and leaves us more space for paradoxes and questions than clarity and enlightenment (Blanchard 1995). A definition that brings us closer to accurate knowledge is that games are a social interaction tool where individuals or groups create structures that one learned or recognize from other parts of social life, such as law, politics and rituals. More to the point a cultural form of expression with an ample range of behaviors which creates meaning and joy, based on a common set of rules that are agreed upon in advance. A deviation between individual and collective games are of course possible (Blanchard 1995).

Deep Play is a relevant and descriptive term in this context. The expression was created by Clifford Geertz during a research at Bali, where he tested his own theories in local cockfights. Geertz concludes that participation in cockfights is some sort of education on a sentimental level for members of the Balinese society. Education that teaches their own culture's character together with an individual degree of reason which all takes shape when expressed publicly in a collective context as the cockfight. Topics are animalism, narcissism, gambling, status, rivalry, blood and will to sacrifice.

These topics are all important in the Balinese people's ability to both feel and fear their own rage. This kind of education through experience makes you discover a set of rules at one level, while the other level allows for certain degree of negotiation of those rules, making it into a

symbolic structure. Peoples reality are rediscovered many times, and so on one's affiliation will feel both real and important. A cockfight can hence be considered as a process where citizens come in touch with their inner emotions and feelings as well as the collective rage and fury, all at once (Geertz 1973).

Research on hockey

Hockey are for many people outside Canada just a another minor sport in the giant jungle of different sport branches. For Canadians though, the game seems to be able to engage large crowds of people, and one can argue that hockey reflect both Canadian culture and identity. Such a statement is obviously simple and very generalizing, and sadly enough researcher's havn't taken this "question" seriously enough in social sciences during later years (Holman 2009). As Holman and other academics has pointed out this type of research has great potential in both Canada and US. Most contributions are generally focused around the economic science where consumerism of sports, game theory, ticket prices and infrastructure politics dominate. The research on hockey in anthropology and sociology originates from early 2000's and are usually funded and carried out by Canadian universities (Dopp & Harrison 2009).

Inside sociology, hockey culture is described through modernity and physical activities. A popular argument claims that Canada, as other countries in the western world, has restructured hockey from a traditional amateur paradigm, where everything is organized on micro levels, and towards professional institutions created by political motivations. This carries hockey into a space where superior standards, structures and values are dominating, in contrast to the old and undefined spaces where local forms of individual and collective creativity can develop without many boundaries (Robidoux 2002).

Such critiques are based on skepticism towards outcome driven learning, especially for young athletes. One argue that modern hockey has become an arena for a few and very talented athletes that are single out from early age. This process is thought to overlook late bloomers and

remove the fun away from the game too early. Point being that hockey is created for a few types of individuals that should make it to the top level, NHL, and not for everyone who would like to participate.

The Summit series, an 8 game long hockey tournament between Canada and the Soviet Union in 1972, is a very special chapter in Canadian history. The epic battles on ice was played in both countries, and would eventually change the way Canadians people viewed themselves, since this event can be interpreted as a time and space where Canadians participated in a collective cultural experience. “For once disparate notions of class, ethnicity and gender were welded into a rare Canadian moment” (Holman 2009:45).

The matches were a lot more even than the Canadian people expected in advance. It might have been true for some of the players as well. Even though the series ended with Canadian victory a very interesting and unexpected and glorifying process is described by various academics. This process is interesting because Canadians looked at themselves instead of seeking recognition in their opponent nation. Who Canada played against, how they won against and where one played didn't seem to mean anything at all. What mattered was the Canadian sense of who they were, that it became confirmed through victory and later transformed into an epic past that only could be challenged as a symbol. Canadians could now feel an “us”. We won, and we are best in hockey (Kennedy 2009a).

Work or play?

Is it ok to define hockey as work? On a professional level the simple answer is yes. Since these players make a living entirely based on the money they earn from their clubs and sponsors, it should mean they are equals to other professions like engineers, psychologists and veterinaries. Hence the objective to compare hockey with so called normal professions, would be to clarify what type of roles and abilities that are needed to gain success and results over a whole season. This sort of information can provide us with knowledge about what society recognize as good qualities as a

whole. It could mean anything from blocking a shot for the sake of the team, to the criteria coaches and general manager's use when they choose young talents in the drafts. Point remains the same, a key to success is to find a combination of different types of players that all like to win hockey games in different ways. It doesn't help to have 12 goal scorers if your goalie can't keep the puck out of your own net (Gruneau & Whitson 1993).

If one continue to watch hockey as work representations of violence is impossible to overlook. One questions that immediate arise is why it's still a part of the game? I'm not arguing that it shouldn't be allowed, I just wonder how one can legitimate such actions in a game. There have been little research on this topic, but there are a few and interesting examples from Canadian fiction literature. Since fighting isn't allowed in the NHL, awarded with a personal five minute penalty, this action always operate in some sort of vacuum between the rules and the norms. When fighting, each player need to be aware of whats allowed and whats not, especially norms that exists between players. One of the fiction novels I mentioned brings these complex structures of symbols to life through the protagonist. It shows how hockey players balance inside and outside boundaries, and how they might not be comfortable with their options and choices (Blake 2009).

The "enforcer" is an informal role in hockey, where players filling this role are hired for their fighting skills and not how many goals they can score. This type of role was invented to protect the most talented players on every roster. Any given team tried to establish fear in the opponents will to body check and play dirty tricks on their superstar during games. The fear being that you would be forced to fight the big and tough enforcer if you did something out of line when facing a superstar player. The role of the enforcer is hence an antidote against cheap shots and unfair play that could hurt skilled players in the long run. The fight in itself doesn't usually last more than 30 seconds and up until one minute, depending how tired the players are prior to the fight. The two players fighting drop their gloves and fight bear handed. Professional hockey has two linesmen present in every game, and it's their job to break up the fight eventually. That happens if they spot a mismatch, any danger of severe injuries, or when wither one of the players seems done

(Grunneau & Whitson 1993).

Other fictive literature is interpreted with a perspective around identity by researcher Jamie Dopp. He explores the myth about “the good Canadien kid”, where young males are educated through participation in organized hockey from early age. Dopp has on particular point where he describes how kids seek success in hockey and so on experience life in itself, with all types of different desires, that drives us towards actions which might end up cause pain for one self or others. This type of experiences can lead to great insight, precisely through this egoism and pain (Dopp 2009).

Is hockey important?

You have read it or heard it before. Hockey is just a game. That might be true in itself, but one should never underestimate how sports can provoke positive or negative emotions in both individuals and groups. The backdrop for this current example is a trade where Chris Pronger was dealt away from his club, Edmonton Oilers. Trades are the only way to acquire players who have contracts with another NHL club. Pronger, a high draft pick with multiple impressive seasons with St. Louis Blues, had been acquired in 2005 after the lockout that canceled a whole regular season. Now one year later Pronger requested a trade away from Edmonton. This created strong reactions in the city, where he later got a nickname as the public enemy No.1 in Edmonton. The frustration is explained in terms of gift-giving inspired by Mauss, where reciprocity was the subject of discussion. Fans felt that they had given a lot of emotions and ovation from the stands towards Prongers play on the ice. Fans had spent money on tickets and jerseys with his name and number for the sole purpose of showing appreciation. When Pronger decided that he wanted out, fans interpret this as a betrayal and humiliation towards the city and its citizens (Hyat, Foster & Julien 2009).

Symbol theory

Throughout this introduction liminality has appeared in more than one place. To fully grasp the qualities of the liminal stage, or being in a limbo, one needs to understand how symbols and rituals are defined and used. How does one define the term symbol? Victor Turner argues:

“symbol is a thing regarded by general consent as naturally typifying or representation or recalling something by possession of analogous qualities or by association in fact or thought” (Turner 1967:19).

Turner believes he has discovered platforms where a ritual exercises refers to social activities where groups adapt through internal changes, which again reconstruct or renegotiate the groups external surroundings. In such a perspective, ritual symbols work as a factor in social activity, often in a positive manner. The symbol per se, is associated with human interest, purpose and meaning, whether they have been expressed eternal or as a result of observed behavior. The ability and structure of a symbol can thus be interpreted as a dynamic unit, at least in the context where the action took place. Such symbols are defined in three different groups: external and observatory characterizations, interpretations from specialists and last significant contexts created by social anthropologists.

The complexity of the symbol is explained in terms of three abilities that relate towards meaning and expression: 1. *condensation* – a simple formation or direct expression, 2. *unification of disparate significates* – association of multiple units that doesn't necessarily belong together (metaphors) and 3. *polarization of meaning* – two oppositions or extremes, in this context usually divided between sensation(feeling) and ideology. One distinct and dominant symbol encompasses and represent a natural necessity on one side, and a social need or desire on the other, both at the same time.

An intimate association of matter and moral. It's worth to mention that Turner conjures the

importance of how meaning and value: exegetical, operational, and positional.

This simply means that people can "read" the meanings of symbols that is said about them through interpretation (exegesis), actions (operations) performed with them, for example, that fathers treat their sons wounds while sitting on stick, and their relation to other symbols (position). All this forms the foundation for interpretation, and it is necessary to interpret them across multiple levels if you want to fully receive all the messages a symbol are able to communicate (Turner 1967).

Ritual

A ritual is a stereotyped sequence of activities involving gestures, words and objects. This is performed in an isolated location and is designed to influence supernatural entities or forces on behalf of the actors' goals and interests. Rituals can be seasonal initiation of a culturally defined moment around changes in climatic cycles or of a special activity such as planting and harvesting. It can also be the process that occurs when one moves from winter to summer pastures. Contrary, they can act subjectively, in other words responsible to give answers to an individual or collective crisis (Turner 1967). In a very generalist manner, one can make use of Bobby Alexander's definition:

"a ritual defined in the most general and basic concepts is a performance, planned or impromptu, which causes a transition from everyday life to an alternative context in which everyday life is changed" (Bowie 2006: 140).

Alexander emphasized that rituals are part of our everyday life whether it is religious or not. Durkheim defines rite as a kind of custom pretty similar to the definition above. What distinguishes rite and ritual is primarily that rite is linked to activities of a religious nature in which faith and sacredness is a necessity. This assertion is supported by S.J. Tambiah stating that ritual is:

"a culturally constructed system of symbolic communication. It is constituted of pattern-

based and orderly sequences of words and acts, often expressed in multiple media, where content and arrangement are characterized in varying degrees of formality, stiffness, condensation and repetition "(Bowie 2006: 141).

In other words is it relative whether a ritual is religious or not. This means that we can call parts of “russefeiringen” (Norwegian celebration for graduates of high school) for a ritual. Even the ceremony, where a recruit (soldier) reaches his or hers new status as a trooper or private, can also fall within this category. Arnold van Gennep has formed a familiar concept called Rites of passage, he defines it:

"A mark of transition from one stage of life, season or event to another. All who participate in rites of passage, and every community highlight them in various ways "(Bowie 2006: 147).

The term is used in many contexts to explain the processes of human life that leads to changes in their status. Typical and well-known examples of this is the birth, various initiations, marriage and death. However, van Gennep’s definition also includes phenomena's such as festivals and pilgrimages, the reason being that larger parts of human behavior, whether sacred or secular, as long as it meets his model consists of three stages: separation, transition and incorporation. He uses two parallel terms to explain movement from a stage to another:

Separation - transition - Incorporation

Preliminal - Liminal – postliminal

Separation is the stage where you are separated from the structural community. The transition or liminal phase occurs when everything gets turned upside down, where one point is that individuals

should not be separable or stand out in any way from each other. In several stages as mentioned, clothing and uniforms are used to support and reinforce this notion. In the final stage, you return to the community, but now with valuable experiences and lessons from the earlier stages. In other words, life is not exactly the same as it was before you started the process because all the experiences you have with you changes your own perspectives and perceptions (van Gennep 2004).

The symbol becomes a meaningful universe created in the small room that arise when a ritual, that presupposes a conscious act, is created. The meaning and experiences around are perceived and experienced in the liminal stage, which is on the edge or outside the remaining parts of social life otherwise know to man. In other words, a very rich and complex phenomenon, an open scenario, which requires that we treat it seriously. Its true character or meaning will in a way, always remain hidden from individual actors, and can sometimes lose its value, but will never die completely (Turner 1967). This type of dynamics points out, once again, that symbols and rituals about human interpretations constantly changes through social space and have to be dealt with on a regular basis. The factors are many, next to endless, thus a need to invest a lot of time to comprehend what we actually experience.

Liminality

Turner first introduced his own ideas of liminality 1967, mainly focused around Van Gennep's previous work on rites of passage, mentioned above. He chooses to focus entirely on the middle stage called the transitional or liminal stage. Turner argues that "the subject of passage ritual is, in the liminal period, structurally, if not physically, 'invisible'" (1967:95). Implying that the status of liminal individuals is both socially and structurally ambiguous. He broaden his idea even further in a comprehensive definition of liminality. This definition is famous in later works as well:

"Liminality may perhaps be regarded as the Nay to all positive structural assertions, but as in some sense the source of them all, and, more than that, as a realm of pure possibility

whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise” (1967: 97).

Turner is quick to address, with reference to Mary Douglas’ *Purity and Danger*, that liminal individuals are contaminated, and thus very dangerous in touch with individuals that hasn’t been through the liminal stage yet. These liminal individuals have nothing: no status, secular clothing, rank, kinship position, nothing to separate them structurally from their peers. Any given group of liminal individuals should not be viewed as a normal social hierarchy but instead as a communal group in which everyone are ranked equally (Turner 1967).

Another famous work by Turner, called “Liminality and Communitas”, begins with a definition of liminal individuals as “neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremony” (1988:95). He continues to name terms like non-structure or anti-structure which refers to work in “Betwixt and Between”, they can need to be understood through concepts he calls the “realm of pure possibility” and “structural invisibility”. Turner later choses the Latin term “communitas” to phrase anti-structure. He refers to communitas and social structure as two major models for human interrelationships.

The second model of human interrelatedness called communitas, has a number of cultural manifestations connected to itself, hence is liminality only one of them. Turner mentions two other kinds of abstract ideas: marginality and inferiority. Those terms operates and exist in between (liminality), on the edges (marginality), and beneath (inferiority). As an example of communitas in modern Western society, he refers to the well-known “hippie” movements around the bay area of San Francisco in the 1970s. Turner argues that these have operated outside social structures and chosen to manifest communitas through inferiority. For example, the hippies had a very different attitude towards sex and drugs which can be described as an instrument of communitas rather than a means of forming structural ties or bonds, such as marriage (Turner 1988).

For Turner, liminality is the most visible expression of anti-structure in society. Even when it is the opposite of structure, an antitheis, that dissolves the structure and thus perceived as dangerous

by those responsible for maintaining structure, it is also works as the source of structure. Just as chaos is the source of order, liminality represents limitless possibilities where social structure emerges form at one point. People of the liminal stage are stripped of everything that might separate them from each other. They exist in-between the social structure, like in a crevasse on a glacier, a place and space where they can be more aware of themselves. To sum it up liminality functions as a middle point of, let say a running course, where the starting point and the finish is on either side. When one return from a temporary condition like this a process of reincorporation towards social structure has already started (Turner 1988).

2. METHOD

What to do?

My first week in Toronto was intense, interesting and lonely all at once. Prior to the arrival I had found a place to live for the first week and I had found a couple of hockey clubs that I wanted to contact. My goal was as mentioned earlier to get on the inside of a professional hockey club. I knew that the Toronto Maple Leafs or any other National Hockey League club would be next to impossible. Instead I had singled out Toronto Marlies and Mississauga Steelheads as possible targets. I tried to get in touch on numerous ways but didn't get any positive feedback at all. I even showed up to their offices in person to see if that made any difference. Answer was the same all the time. I could be welcomed to watch practices, but I wouldn't be allowed to interview any personnel or participate in any of their activities. After multiple rejections I tried three other clubs in Guelph, Kitchener and Oshawa, fairly close to Toronto, but no luck there either.

It didn't feel good but I moved on and figured I could check out university hockey. Toronto has three big universities with two of them located in the downtown area. Ryerson has a team called Rams and they play at the old Maple Leaf Gardens. The former home of the Toronto Maple Leafs is now built down from 15 000 seats to 2 800. I was actually very excited to visit since I had hopes of history and memories from the earlier years. In the end my experience was a bit disappointing since half the place had been turned into a large grocery store. The other part was a hockey rink and athletic facility. At the rink I got to see hockey, at least. The game was fun, but I would learn that their season was almost over and that playoff hope only existed in theory.

I realized I was not gonna get any insight of any professional or semi-professional hockey clubs. I had to change tactics, but I wasn't sure how. I got in touch with my supervisor and asked for advice. He told me to socialize with people on the streets. What do they think about hockey? And why is hockey interesting and relevant to them? I had no doubt that it could work, but I didn't

feel overly excited. It seemed a bit boring compared to my previous idea, but since I couldn't figure something better out I sat down and made new plans for the upcoming week.

As I lived in a hostel I could pick up my two bags and leave whenever I wanted. Some of my new and foreign friends had talked about traveling further to Montreal. This seemed like good timing. The lockout had recently ended in the NHL and Maple Leafs would play against Montreal's home town team next Saturday in the season opener. The most historic rivalry one could find in North-American hockey. There existed rumors that a hostel in Montreal had tickets for sale so I made a call to explore my options. Tickets were available and for a great price, Montreal here we come!

I stayed in Quebec for almost a week, had a great time at the hockey game and felt like I finally had something to write about. What made it even better was a random meeting with a hockey enforcer that I will call Patrick. He had family relations with one of the people I had been traveling with from Toronto. I told him about my reasons for being in Canada and later he agreed to meet me for an interview. This event was important for both my confidence and self esteem. I felt like my work had started and I was excited to return back to Toronto. Montreal was a nice place, by all means, but it still felt like Toronto was my type of city.

Getting inside the hockey community

Back in Toronto I found hockey bars to be the most effective way to meet hockey people. I also experienced that Canadians seem to be interested in contact and didn't mind talking to unknown people. This helped me a lot in the early stages. A great example is the time I met one of my informants, Josh, for the first time. I was sitting at a bar stool paying attention to a hockey game up on the screens. The bar was far away from crowded, and most people was busy watching hockey or chatting in small groups. Josh approached me without me noticing before he was right next to me. I was almost a little bit frightened when he talked to me, but I gathered myself quickly and listen to

what the man had to say.

When he asked me to join him for a game of pool I figured it could be fun. He was at first interested to know why a young norwegian would travel all the way to Canada, a country just as cold and rural. I explained how hockey was the biggest reason and from this moment and on our conversation went fluidly. We stayed there for almost three hours, got some food and good drinks watching hockey.

After three months in Canada I went to see my first hockey game at the Air Canada Center to see the Leafs play. Josh got us tickets. Before the game we visited the team store where it's possible to buy Maple Leafs merchandise in every thinkable way. At first, the obvious things as jerseys, clothes and hockey equipment. But also more unorthodox stuff, such as toilet seats, car plates etc. I bought a jersey since I had grown fond of both the city and the hometown club. My choice was made. I was now a Leafs fan for life, no turning back now. As one a unwritten rule in football you can only pick one team and never change unless they cease to exist. I picked this rule up by being an active football player, and fan of my home town club, Odds BK, for many years. Many if my other informants, including Jarred and Tim, showed appreciation for my choice, but joked that this jersey would cause me more pain than joy.

From the first moment I started wear the Leafs jersey to different events, unknown Canadians started talking to me in different situations. For the most parts this happened when I visited bars or Marlies games. Marlies wear identical colors and similar jerseys as the Leafs since they are a farm club. Hence it's considered appropriate to wear leafs jerseys at Ricoh Coliseum. The jersey worked as a conversation starter. When people saw me in the Leafs jersey they figured I was a fan and that I had opinions about the club. It felt like i became of part of the Leafs family, a member of the collective. That gave me easy access to a lot if information that played a part in this paper.

It also seemed like many Canadians took me for being Canadian. Before I opened my

mouth, that is. It happened with or without the jersey. After some quick comments back and forth they usually asked where I was from because I had a different accent. As a white male with dark blond hair and blue eyes, in common with some Canadians, it seemed that such assumptions was based on my look and appearance. It never happened that anyone asked me about my nationality before I started speaking. This may have been because they were being polite, but I'm pretty sure I sensed a certain surprise when I started talking and they noticed my accent, especially when I wore the Maple Leafs jersey.

Arenas and North-American league system

I visited three professional hockey arenas during my stay in Canada, two in Toronto and one in Montreal. North-American hockey has two league systems that operates closely together, *National Hockey League* and *American Hockey League*. NHL is the highest level, whereas every club in this league has an affiliate team in the AHL. The idea is to develop young players coming from junior hockey or college before they step up into the big league. AHL is often referred to as the minors or the farm league for this reason. The Toronto Maple Leafs are as of 2013 the only NHL club that has an affiliate in the same city, Toronto Marlies. Montreal for example, have their affiliate in Hamilton, Ontario.

The Maple Leafs play at the Air Canada Center, you have Bell Center in Montreal, where NHL club Montreal Canadians play, and finally *Ricoh Colosseum* where you find the Marlies. I watched one game at both the ACC and the Bell Center. At Ricoh I went as many times as possible and watched a total of 17 games during the regular season, 4 games during the playoffs.

Fieldnotes

I wrote scratch notes or jottings on a regular basis when watching hockey, either in bars or at the arenas. I was not afraid to write down in front of my informants. I always had a little notebook with

me wherever I went. It helped a lot since some thoughts and ideas pop up at the weirdest times. When I returned back to my place I always sat down as fast as possible to write a summary of the experience, and expand details around the scratch notes (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw 1995).

Some days I choose to focus on certain subjects, such as focusing on fighting a few days and focus on presentation in games during other days. Observing this way meant I was more focused on certain themes, which I think strengthened my field notes. This does not mean that I excluded other events beyond the scope that was in focus, but it helped me to narrow down what it was I was looking for during busy periods. At the same time I cleaned thoughts for interesting topics in the field.

Participant observation

My approaches to obtaining data was mainly based on participation and observation. I also supplemented with informal and formal interview, e-mails and text messages. I have also used secondary sources such as TV broadcasts, websites, blogs, magazines, journals and newspapers. There are a jungle of expressions used to describe hockey that I struggled to comprehend at first. These sources helped me to get up to a certain level. In the start of my field work I often felt embarrassed to ask my informants about expressions and language. Broadcasts where one can see practical examples on the ice combined with commentary is such an important toll to understand sports.

Anthropology stand out with participant observation as a method. This type of method is both interesting and fun since you will stay present and participate in daily activities over a longer period of time in line with the people being studied. It's a method in which you participate, not only as a researcher but also as a human being. The closer you live and participate towards the situation/context and the people/society the better results one can achieve (Spradley 1980).

Spradley also argues that we should participate as a subject in conversation with others when

researching. It means, that the researcher must engage in what others say and do, rather than to stand outside and make himself alien to what is being said or done. All contexts in which people interact, experienced not only through words but also with feeling and body. Therefore it's a physical challenge to enter the field (1980).

I was in fact not prepared for how much the body would matter in my research. What surprised me the most is how good once body and emotions is at remembering experience and emotion if one use it determined. It took me some time, but I eventually noticed that my body was going to help me understand the way it was consume hockey as a fan. The experiences i've been trough in Canada has become an important methodological tool for obtaining data. The emotions and thoughts I felt determined my experiences of what it means to be Leafs fan, but in line with what Geertz argues I assume that these feelings don't say anything about other people's experiences of the same thing (Geertz 1973). Instead it's more about utilizing my self as a testing device, where my experiences provides the reader with relevant information.

Interviews

I used informal conversations and interviews in most contexts, formal interviews two times. Before the formal interviews I made a guide with all questions I could think off at the time. I also mad smaller guides when I saw my regular informants. This helped me to control, especially the informal conversations, as they sometimes intended to take paths far away from hockey (Briggs 1997).

The formal ones were done with a tape recorder, I used an app on my phone, but I also wrote down jottings as I asked many follow up questions. I decided to include larger parts of the interview with Patrick in the paper because I believe it gives a good and realistic picture of the fighting in action on the ice. This knowledge is important since I later spend pages to discuss conversations on this topic with my other informants. The persons I discussed with had strong opinions and their

comments can't be presented if the context around the fight per se, is not explored at first. I also used tape recorder in bars most times. Sometimes, sadly enough, those datas ended up being damaged because of noise. This meant my jottings became an important technique.

Selection of informants

I will present (5) main informants that have made a big impression on me and my field notes and hence through this paper. Most of the hockey relevant information are based on conversations, interviews, texts and emails with all of them. I have also met other people, around 10, that have helped me understand different aspects of hockey. I met some of them in Montreal and the rest around Toronto. Their information is valuable, but since I only socialized with them in short periods, this type of data is used to control or challenge the other datas I have collected. Except for Patrick, all of my informants are active hockey fans with a "blue hart". I have interviewed them formally, informal and watched a lot of hockey with them.

Patrick, a true fighter/enforcer, is a canadian born male and was in his late 20s when I met him. He wanted to stay anonymous so I made up the name Patrick. I ran into him in Montreal and was lucky enough to catch his attention. He wasn't too excited to have an interview to begin with, but later change his mind after a bit of pressure from our common friend and myself. Patrick is straight forward and easy to communicate with. He used words that I could understand easily for the most part, and explained well when I asked him too. Since I only met him three times I didn't get to know him, but our talk was a good experience overall. It was important for my own confidence concerning language and interview technique.

Robert (Bob) was a 55 year old male I socialized with during Marlies home games. Born in Scarborough, just east of Toronto downtown area, he had followed the Leafs ever since he was a kid. During my field work he was employed in landscaping industry. His kids had both moved out so he and his wife had more time to spare. He usually went alone to Marlies games, since his wife

only liked to watch their kids play. Bob told me stories from his own life that had connections to hockey. He liked to discuss a wide range of topics, when I got a better grasp of hockey myself we had heated conversations sometimes. Often about players performances and referee calls. I only brought my notebook to these games and never interviewed Bob formally.

Joshua (Josh) was a postgraduate student at Ryerson University when I met him. He was 25 years of age, Toronto native and studied economics. Josh wrote a blog about Maple Leafs where he used advanced statistics to evaluate players and team performances. Thus expressing a very academic language when talking about hockey. His fascination for statistics was quite exciting since I came from the totally opposite standpoint with qualitative methods from social anthropology. This created a premise for debates and very interesting conversations about Leafs and NHL, and hockey in general. I met Josh in a hockey bar one evening, he challenge me to a game of pool and we hit it off quite well. The bar called Shoeless Joe's became our meeting point and we watched hockey together a least once a week for at least 3 months. In interviewed him formally with tape recorder once, just before leaving Canada. I had created some questions out of my notes and was interested to get his views on what I had found.

Jarred, 23, and Timothy (Tim), 23, was two guys I met through a common friend. They where both born just outside Toronto and had been active hockey players a minor levels for large parts of their life. Both studied at Ryerson University and lived in a house share not to far away from my place. We spent a lot of times together consuming NHL and Maple Leafs games in various bars. I met them most times together, but also a couple of times on their own because of various reasons. Jarred liked to talk and share information. He had strong opinions and liked to control the conversations. Tim was a bit more laid back, but had just as strong opinions. Even though they and me agreed on many topics some nights ended in pretty heated conversations after the games had finished. I also met them approximately once a week, but for a longer period of time. Our usual bar was a place called The Ballroom.

Becoming a fan

I became good friends with Josh, Jarred and Tim over time. Apart from meeting at bars I was invited to their homes for dinners and parties on different occasions. I also joined them for concerts and similar culture events around the city. This made me feel “at home” to a certain degree, since Toronto did not feel too different from Norway as well. I think it was things like this together with all the good times consuming hockey games that turned me into a Maple Leaf fan. Hockey was all around me, Leafs took most of the space, in a city I enjoyed to explore. I could in other words identify with these young men and their passion for hockey.

My own position

I started to grow interest in the sport of hockey as late as in 2009. I had played unorganized hockey on ponds as a kid but never cared about the game played by professionals on TV. When I was 16 attended a high school which focused on sports and athletics. This school had a modern hockey rink (indoor) nearby which allowed us to have a lot of fun skating and playing hockey throughout the three years. To sum it up my experience with hockey was just unorganized and based on fun. Prior to 2009 I had only watched two hockey games, as one of my class mates played for a local club. The games were fun but not so much that I got hooked or wanted to watch it regularly. My time was spent playing and consuming football.

The event that started a serious interest in hockey was a video game from EA Sports called NHL 10. I was tired of football games and wanted something else to play. I went to a gaming store and had actually decided not to buy any sports related games. I obviously changed my mind and was happy with my choice still after a few weeks. As I started to recognize teams and players I started to pay attention to what happened in the real NHL. I followed scores and started to watch videos on youtube. After quite a while I even started to watch some playoff games live during night time. I never picked any favorite teams, basically because I felt it's weird to pick a team since I only

could follow games on TV. Hence did I consider my self as an observer more than a fan, maybe a fan of hockey. By observing I mean that I watch the game from a perspective where actions on the ice was my main interest. Especially how well they played together as a unit. I didn't care for the drama in the stands before I went to Canada and could experience it through my self.

3. REPRESENTATION OF VIOLENCE

Fighting in Hockey

During my time in Montreal I was lucky enough to run into a semi-professional hockey player that was hired as an enforcer on his team. Patrick, not his real name, played in a league named Ligue Nord-Américaine de Hockey. A league that has a reputation of being the toughest in north-american, related to the high numbers of penalty minutes and fighting majors. Patrick lived and worked out in Montreal with many of his teammates, while his team played their home games in a small city closer to Quebec City. I met him through a friend and he was willing to meet me later for a longer interview.

We had agreed to meet at a local bar one afternoon close to the McGill University. We sat down and talked about his teams performances of late. They had won last night, lucky enough for me, so his mood was good. Patrick is a big guy, 6'2 (188cm) and roughly 216 pounds (98kg) according to himself. When you see him in person those 216 pounds can't be anything other than muscles. He is indeed a big man but 216 pounds sounds like a lot more than the eye can see. Other than his asymmetrical nose, nothing about his appearance really sets him apart from any other canadian men I have met. I will admit that his face has a rough look, but since he is very polite and good at small talk, like most canadians, you don't see him as a scary person. After 10 minutes of conversation about different topics I ask my first relevant question: - How would you describe yourself as a hockey player? "I'm a team player that plays and honest" Patrick replies. I asked what he meant when he said honest. He didn't need any time thinking but explained how honesty on the ice it's about honoring your role by doing whatever the team needs to win a game. He loves fighting and says it was his own decision to fill this role, To play hard and frustrate opponents didn't felt good for Patrick.

I continue with questions about Patrick's career. He tells me about his hockey life in

different leagues and cities. His career has taken him to both western and eastern parts of Canada, and his devotion and short anecdotes paint a picture of a fun adventure. One of his best years came as a rookie in the Canadian Hockey League, a major junior league for players between 16 and 20 years of age. This is the first level in Canadian hockey where fighting, 1-on-1, during games doesn't end up with big consequences, such as long suspensions for players or fines for clubs. In Patrick's words this means that fighting is practically allowed. He played over 40 games (72 in regular season) that season, scored 5 points and had 250 penalty minutes. The coaching staff were happy with his job defending their best players and he got acknowledgments from the fan base. A very solid achievement from a 16-year-old I would suspect. Patrick says he only lost one or two of the 37 fights that year.

The second season was not as good for Patrick. His club had changed coaching staff, hence his role decreased and injuries wore him down throughout the season. He tells me about a stint of 3 games, in a road trip, where he played with an injured wrist which made it hard to grasp his stick and fire off good shots. He was also afraid that a fight might make it all worse, but in the end Patrick healed his wrist. Season ended with 20 games and no points at all. When I think the worst part is over another bad story appears. Patrick had worked out quite well over the following summer. After all the minor injuries that had been bugging him, none of them related to fighting, he talks about how he had a good feeling mixed with positive expectations for the upcoming season. Training camp is fine and his roster spot seems safe for the opening game. 15 minutes into the game Patrick is very unlucky and ends up breaking his tibia. He gets checked into the boards while losing his balance. The complicated fracture spoils the whole season. Patrick talks about it in a very natural manner and he seems like it's far behind him.

He ended up playing one more season in CHL before moving on to new adventures and challenges. In his first season in LNAH he dropped the gloves 70 times in 51 games. A number he never came close to ever again. Patrick admits that it was very tough and required a lot of energy, but he doesn't have any regrets about it. He has many stories and it seems important to him that I know

he is enjoying what he does. As I mentioned earlier he is a semi-professional and has been forced to work part time during some years. After lacing up his skates in the junior league, he went on to an amateur league. He got paid, but had to get work elsewhere to make a living. I was not surprised one bit when he told me he got a part time position at the local fire station, in the small town he moved to. Even though it was hard to combine the two jobs Patrick felt honored to work as a fire man. "It was the toughest two seasons of my life, I didn't have a whole lot of energy left when I was off work or training. But I earned enough money, and I felt like I mattered in the community on a different level".

How to fight

I move on to questions about his fighting. He tells me about his big body and his will to work out. Patrick was physically developed early, and he was early categorized as a player to bring energy, grit and sacrificing/tough play. That meant he never played more than 15 minutes a game, usually around 10. He wasn't bothered by this at all. Patrick recalls how he grew a lot one summer and his dad was a frustrated and a bit shocked when he realized he had to buy his son a full set on new equipment. "Hockey is an expensive sport at times. When I broke my sticks my father was never happy" followed up by a smile and a laugh. Since Patrick knew that he was signed to fight, he trained mixed martial arts when he had time to spare. He started out when he turned 17 and kept on until today. Patrick says he enjoys this kind of activity in itself, but also did it to prolong his hockey career. Not to hurt his opponents, but to defend himself better.

Fighting these days is a lot about avoiding injury. Your opponent will get in hits during a scrap, so if you wanna do this over several years it's important to have a good defense with counter attacks. It took me some years to realize it. I remember how I used to swing around a lot during my first years.

I ask about Patrick's coaches over the years. I wonder how much power and authority they have, and if they control the fighting. He starts to explain how hockey is very well organized. Even in junior's. The staff consists of different coaches with one head coach having controlling. Certain things are very conservative and might seem very strict to an outsider. One thing is sure: "You can't really be an effective coach if you don't control the dressing room. Coaches need big balls". He continues to talk about how they give you a defined role and let you know right away if you take too many liberties. I ask him if his coach ever tells him straight up to go out and fight. Patrick takes a few seconds to reflect. He looks at me and then says: "When I was a rookie back in junior's my coach told me to go out there and fight a couple of times. After a few games I learned when it was expected of me." I want to test his positive feelings for fighting and ask how he feels right after a fight, and how the next day goes on. Patrick looks at me and smiles: "It's for sure very painful in my right fist the next day, sometimes the face as well. But during games I have so much testosterone in me so then it's all good".

I wanted to know more about the practicality of the fights. Hence I asked: - How does a fight usually start? Patrick provides a very long answer. It can be divided into staged fights and hockey related fights. It occurs when two enforcers are put on the ice together, not every time of course. Coaches do this on purpose sometimes. The staged fight usually starts with one of the enforcers approaching the other one and asking straight forward: "do you wanna go". One example is right before a face off when the play is dead. It's normal that the guy asking is playing for the team that is behind on the score board. Hence a fight is viewed as an action that creates or ignites a spark of energy in team mates and fans, if you play at home. Other times the question might come up with between two fighters that have certain history. If you won a fight one game, some guys will ask for a rematch when one meet again next time. I ask Patrick if this means that enforcers keep scores or stats between each other. He admits that this has been true in some cases. Winning a fight matters to most enforcers, a lot to him.

Patrick moves on to the hockey related fights. They occurs in many different ways. The most common one is retaliation when team mates gets hurt after a tough hit. If the enforcer is not on the ice, other tough players usually pick up the responsibility to fight. Another similar type of fight is the protection of superstars or most talented players, depending on the league size. When such a player get punished physically, even if it's not an illegal hit or harms the player immediately, enforcers remember the opponents number and fight them at first possibility. Same type of fight that is explained in the introduction of this paper.

As I did some research on hockey in North America, prior to my field work, I found evidences of an informal codex that exist between hockey players. Practically referred to as "the code" in media. I'm very curious about this norm based system which seems to rely on trust and respect amongst enforcers. Patrick smiles at me when I bring it up. He almost seemed impressed with my question. His answer can be summed up in two words: respect and fair play towards ones peers. He's a bit unwilling about giving away to many details but I remind him that my paper is written for a University in Norway. One of the most important rules is to stay away from the captains. That counts for every hockey player, but as an enforcer hell will brake loose if that happens.

Patrick continue to talk and says its most important to "Play it clean", you can have a little fun with it if you win (the fight), but don't embarrass the guy. "He's out there doing what you do for a living and you have to respect that. You don't embarrass the guy, you can beat him, but you don't embarrass him, nobody wants to lose a fight". Patrick recalls one night in his second season in the CHL where an opponent got in an upper cut that would find its way to his nose. The linesman asked if he was ok and Patrick responded with that he will be ok if the linesman would just bring him over to the penalty box. "It felt a bit embarrassing but since I din't know where my own penalty box was I figured I should admit the loss and take care of myself".

Its important to pick the right spots for a fight. According to Patrick, there is a time and place for it:

Never put your team in a bad situation because of your desires to win a fight. A good example is when your up by two goals. A fight is not appropriate at this time, since nothing can be gained. If your team needs a wake up call maybe, but its all in on a pretty thin line. If you hurt your teams chances at winning games, coaches will bench you.

Patrick is very engaged now and continues to emphasize the importance of doing what's right for the team:

We fighters are team guys. We don't just do it for ourselves. You don't make excuses and you don't back down when something happens that need to be dealt with. There might be nights when you don't feel good, when your hands hurt or there's something else that bothers you, like a shoulder. I think to myself that if i'm healthy enough to play, i'm healthy enough to fight.

This is what the pride side of fighting I think in my own mind. He continues:

If your an enforcer, your job is to fight. I take pride in it and always try to be the best possible. You should know what is expected and deal with it. You may not have to fight on a given night, but when you get the chance you can't back down. If another guys (enforcer) ask under right circumstances don't let him down. You need to respect him as college.

Another important lesson is to stop hitting when ones opponent is clearly hurt. "No matter how the situation are, you mate hate the guy or at least dislike him, it doesn't matter when he's down or

really hurt. Then its over!” he says it firm and strict, like he tries to teaches me something. He continues: “You don’t keep on throwing punches and you let the linesmen get in. If you show this kind of respect every night, other guys will do the the same for you”. Patrick knows what he is talking about. It’s not hard to imagine that he is proud of his job. He keep on talking about guys who has any given disadvantage. Most times, enforcers will let up on opponents if their hockey sweater is pulled up over his head. Other examples is if he hasn't gotten off his glove, unless he is the type of player that is know to pull of cheap tricks. “It’s a bit sad but some guys don’t play honest. They are not strong or tough enough so they pull out all kinds of crap”. Is ask of his worst examples and he tells me of one incident when he got bitten. Other times Patrick has watched while guys have done eye-gouges and hair pulling.

I have never liked long hair so it (pulling) hasn’t been a problem for me. As a fighter I could never had it anyway. I just gets in the way even if it dosen’t get pulled. Some guys have other preferences about looks and I respect that. So it’s really low of guys that pulls hair on purpose, very low.

He continues to talk about weight classes and fair fights:

You don't pick fights with smaller guys. You can trash talk and fire them up, but in the end you don’t fight a player that don’t have any experience. You just tell them what might happen if they continue to bother you. It's fine to go after bigger guys, but not smaller guys. Its classless and almost a bit cowardly. Unless he comes after, just stay away I guess.

A hated type of players seems to be the “tough guys” that talk more than they fight. -+ “There might times when you have to fool a guy into a fight because your coach maybe told you to turtle

on him”. I ask Patrick what this means and he describes turtling as way of backing of cowardly.

I don't like this trick but sometimes that's your job as well, you sacrifice your own feelings for the team. No fighters like to talk without acting, it's not what the code is about, you want to fight a good fight. Most guys, me as well, don't like to admit this or even talk about it, but that's what happens and you have let it go when it's for the sake of winning. A team is built with different guys, some score goals or stop opponents from scoring. Others are out there to protect team mates or bring energy. You want to be proud of what you do and respect of course. Nobody gives guys that only talk any respect.

We keep on talking for a bit but I don't have any more relevant questions. To sum it up, it's words like pride, honesty and respect that seems to be the ingredients in both “the code” and the relations between enforcers. Considering his comments it almost sounds like a distinct brotherhood within hockey.

Deconstructing fighting

I mentioned terms as nationalism and masculinity earlier in this paper. Based on the answers I got in the interview with Patrick I believe it's fair to argue that fighting in hockey serves as an object that constructs an excessive consciousness that make players wanna fight, which hockey in itself could struggle to maintain if it hadn't been for the fans. Effective because the fight is one activity that establishes strong emotions through hockey clubs that have their own identity. It's the activities in themselves that ensure the socialization of the individuals, which can lead to mobilization of large units towards a desired confrontation. A war like motivation. Hockey then represents a public celebration of the endless and ruthless battles, in a western society that are built around pacified institution (Faure 1996). The enforcer fight for his team and will do everything possible to let them

win.

Enforcer's out of date

To an outsider like me, fighting at first seemed like a form of practice that separates it self from other practices in team sports. Legal violence is found in martial arts where there are official rules that needs to be followed. The only official rule of fighting (rule 46) actually states that fighting is not allowed and should be awarded with a 5 minute major penalty to any players that engage in such actions. The rule also focus on suspensions and fines if fighters overstep certain boundaries. Fighting in last period will end in a game misconduct penalty, fighting off the ice is penalized hard, removing helmets before fighting is penalized and so on, a third player that brakes into the fight is rewarded with game misconduct and suspensions, and so on (NHL.com). It seems like the overall intention is to protect players from getting hurt. In the fights I watched live only one of them was penalized with more than 5 minutes to each player fighting.

I brought up fighting one time when I met Josh at Shoeless Joe's. We were paying attention to a game where a fight broke loose. I asked Josh straight up if he liked the fighting part of hockey. "I don't dislike fighting, but I can't say I really like it either. It has it's part in the game but I feel like it's gone to far". I made him deepen his comments: "The problem in my eyes is the goons, guys that can just fight. They don't bring a whole lot to their teams". Goons refer to enforcers, and a wide conception in todays games is that enforcers can't play the game. "Fighters are liabilities to their team in my opinion. Look at McLaren and Orr, they can't play more than 5 minutes a game. Thats two guys that make the whole team pay". McLaren and Orr play for the Leafs. They are both considered as enforcers.

I knew where Josh is going with this. As a stats guy he loves to look at numbers. He has been lecturing me about advanced statistics in hockey. His favorite is Corsi, a plus-minus statistic that measures shot attempts. A player receives a plus for any shot attempt (on net, missed, or

blocked) that his team directs at the opponent's net, and a minus for any shot attempt against his own net. Corsi has proven significant correlations between player and team success. Josh once told me: "Corsi is a great gift to hockey. It values players that can create offense and keep possession. That means you less time in your own zone. From a fans perspective thats all you want". Josh thinks the physical side of the game has gone too far. "You always hear coaches and pundits talk about players that have character and plays the game hard. What does that mean? It's just a bunch of crap".

I try to get our conversation back to the fights and ask him: - What's the problem with the fighters then. Are their corsi stats that bad? "Their corsi is usually bad, another problem is their low minutes. Our top line with Kessel, Bozak and van Riemsdyk has to play up to 20 minutes a game. That becomes a problem over time". Josh is taking about the Leafs. He is not the biggest fan of coach Carlyle and he has certain problems with some players as well. Assumptions that have connections with low corsi stats. - So you don't dislike the enforcers per se? "I don't hate fighters, no. They are solid guys but they are not solid hockey players. I have no problem with players fighting, I just hate when they can't play hockey".

I continue to ask about protection of smaller players: - What about the star players that get pushed around, like Crosby? He has had a lot of concussions. "That's a fair point you mention, but I still think you can find other tough players who can play and at the same time fill this type of role." Josh continues by mentioning a bunch of tough guys in the NHL that both score goals, set up plays and drop the gloves if needed. In the end it seems like he cares about his team winning chances more than the fights. I ask him if the fights are overrated as a form of entertainment.

As entertainment? Well I respect guys for doing it usually, like when they protect a star player or something. But the staged fights between enforcers just seems to old and out of date to me. I mean a fight last for about 30 seconds. I'm not that fascinated by two guys

hitting each other to be honest. I'll rather watch a skilled guy make plays and fight off checks for 10 seconds instead".

“Fighting is just a part of the game”

I also discussed fighting with Bob. Bob had played hockey on different levels until he was 45. He took some years off while he had kids, but returned as fast as he had time available. Last ten years had been less active since his team mates prioritized hcokey less. Bob was part of a team still, but they usually just met for tournaments a couple a times a year. We talked about fighting more than one time, and our discussions provided me with good insights.

One of the first questions I asked him was of course if he appretiated the fighting. Bob answerd that he saw it as a part of the game. I told asked him to explain furthermore, and he started to talk about tradition. He told me how hockey is a very conservative sport. Bob used the example of goal cameras, and that it had taken a long time to get them into the game. In shorts its a combinations of cameras that specifically is used to determine if the puck crossed the goal line in situatuions where the refferees are in doubt. Referees call an office in Toronto that has access to all these cameras, where the office employees hence decide if the puck can be seen crossing the line or not. The debate had been going on for a long time before any action was taken. Fighting can thus bee seen as an old tradition that are not easily deminished.

I feel like he is trying to avoid my question. I ask him agin what his feelings towards fighting. Bob asnwers that he used to appretiate it more before he got kids. He went to games with his friends and his wife. He didn't necessarily love the fights per se, but he though it was an honest part of hockey. "I respect those guys, they sacrifice themselves". When he got kids and they eventually staterd to play hockey he had to renegotiate his feelings. He had two daughters and one son that all started playing. Since fighting is not allowed at all in girls hockey his biggest concener was his son. He had some impressive abilities as a player when he lined up as a defensemen at

midget level in Toronto. This level is for players of age under the age of 18. Fighting is not allowed here either and penalties are more harsh than junior and professional hockey. But fighting still happens at times. Some players were quite big in size already, Bob recalls. He watched his son play every game.

Bob tells me how he felt ambivalent towards his son's actions on the ice. He wanted him to be a tough player but he also didn't want to see him get hurt. He remembers that he once told his son that if he was about to be involved in a fight he better win them. Throughout the two seasons his son played at this level he ended up in three fights. Bob says they were all short ones and that his son defended guys on his team. He explains how it was a bit of a relief that his son was the one instigating. It made him feel like his son somehow had control and wanted this himself. I ask if he thought his son's coaches asked him to do fight. Bob doesn't believe that since it only happened three times.

4. RITUALS AND SYMBOLS

Standing ovation

I experienced a total of ten fights during live games. 1 in each of the NHL games I saw, and 8 at Ricoh Coliseum. They all caused quite similar responses from the crowd, with some deviation. I will illustrate three examples to support this statement and later discuss the nonverbal message this might prove to be.

The first fight I witnessed appeared between Brandon Prust (Canadiens) and Mike Brown (Maple Leafs). It was 13 minutes into the first period and Leafs were up 1-0. Prust body checked Brown a little late, nothing ugly. Brown responded with a push and it seemed like he and Prust had a little conversation. The fight lasted for about 30 seconds without any clear winner. Both in a few punches but the linesmen interfered as Brown got his own jersey over his head. People around the whole arena got up from their chairs as the fight was done. They applauded, whistled and cheered. I asked the guy next to me if this was usual for every fight. He told me that Prust was a new guy on the team so it was a bit special, almost like a form of welcome. He said hello and the crowd responded. The guy also noted that this was the first time in a few years that Canadiens had signed such a tough player. I consider this a staged fight since the score was only one to nothing and less than 8 minutes had been played.

Another staged fight appeared in my second NHL game between Colton Orr (Maple Leafs) and Jay Rosehill (Flyers). It was another short fight that came in the first period. The scoreboard showed one goal for each team. Rosehill checks a Leaf defenseman first and then do the same against Orr. One push follows and gloves are dropped immediately. Rosehill lands some punches and before Orr falls down to the ice. The crowd applauds and shows appreciation, but not as intense as the crowd in Montreal. Maybe because many felt Orr, home player, lost the fight. They still showed him respect anyhow.

My third example is taken from a game between Marlies and Hamilton Bulldogs. We move on to third period where Marlies are up by 3-2. Enforcers from both teams hits the ice at the same shift. Stortini (Bulldogs) immediately goes after home town player Devane and challenge him to fight. It's easy to spot as the puck is on the other side of the zone. Stortini gives Devane a cross check, with his stick, from behind. Devane turns around and retaliates with the same type of check towards Stortini's chest. Both players follow up by throwing their gloves. They stand and wait for the other one to make the first move. They both make contact after a while using one arm to keep distance and the other one to punch. The fight goes on for about 60 seconds. Either one gets in any good punches but Devane loses his helmet before the linemen interfere. People in the stands applaud and cheer, while some of them also decide to stand up.

The powerful act of blocking a shot

During the same game at Ricoh Coliseum, mentioned above I watched the Marlies play an awful period against Hamilton. The crowd was quiet for a long time and it seemed like people around me were very disappointed. Marlies had been on road trip through the larger parts of January and had lost more games than they won. I approached a guy named Bob who was sitting alone not far away from me. Bob, who was a season ticket holder, told me he watched a lot of games now that his kids had grown up and he couldn't watch them play hockey anymore. We talked for the rest of the break until second period started again.

The game was going at a higher pace from both sides now, not just the away team. A couple of minutes later and Jerry D'Amigo draws a penalty. Bulldogs enter the offensive zone after 40 seconds. They're able to set up their formation, and it looks like they want to set up one of their d-men for a slap shot. Greg Scott understands their intention and manages to put his body in front of the shot that eventually is fired off. He blocks the shot with one of his knees down to the ice about 4-5 meters from the d-man shooting. The crowd loved it, in fact many people around us even got up

from the chairs to show Scott their respect. Scott finishes the shift and gets another standing ovation when he skates off the ice after the play is blown dead by the referee.

After the period me and Bob continued our conversation and I asked him why people showed so much passion for the act of blocking a shot. He replied that: "People that love hockey love the grinder's style of playing the game". When I asked what grinder meant, he explained that it was an expression for hard workers in general. People that follow hockey on regular basis, at least in the old days, tend to have a blue collar background. In Bob's words that they loved to see players that worked their ass off, block shots, forecheck and back check on a regular basis. Those two latter expressions means putting pressure on the opponent in the offensive zone, and skate fast back into your own zone when the other team attacks, in that order.

When I later wrote about this event in my notes I became clear to me that I had witnessed an act of nonverbal communication between a player and the crowd. I have no idea about Greg Scott's intentions for blocking the shot, but I think its fair to assume it was a desire to win a hockey game. Not to win through this action alone, but to give his team a chance later on by stopping the puck from going near the goal at this time. I think such an action can be interpreted as a message sent to both his teammates/coach and the crowd, more indirect of course. I think we all can agree that it's quite brave to block a rubber puck that comes towards him in such high speed. One wouldn't just do it for fun. When I asked Bob about this block the next time we met he confirmed my view. "Yes, for sure. It's a clear message. That's a good way to show your bench and the crowd that you're ready to do whatever it takes to win". He says it's no better way to fire up your own team mates than to sacrificing yourself in hockey.

Symbolic gestures

When I mention nonverbal communication I will argue that such a thing can be explained as symbolic gesture. Both fighting and blocking of shots are examples of actions that are done

deliberately with intention to help one's team by increase the chances of winning a given game. Thus can these actions be seen as a direct expression or a *condensation* (Turner 1967).

People in the stands have a certain knowledge towards hockey. Some know more than others but I think it is fair to assume that every grown up Canadian that spends time at hockey games have a basic understanding of rules and game play action. When they applaud after the fight it doesn't seem like they applaud the ending result. Result seems to matter less. What matters is the action of getting into the fight. Whether it is instigating or accepting the challenge. As people recognize hockey they also recognize that players on every team has different roles. This means that fighting is recognized in a symbolic manner. It's the intention of the fight, that leaves one vulnerable, that ask for people's respect.

Blocking shots is more about outcome than inaction. As this action is a part of the ongoing play, in contrast to fights, blocking shots can hence be described as a skill. A skill that is respected by the crowd. If a player fail to block a given shot chances of gaining recognition is very low, because the intention doesn't matter for the eventual outcome. If one consider Bob's comments this skill is impressive and respected because it involves the risk of both pain and injury, hence it's viewed as a sacrificing action. In this context the nonverbal message is very clear and becomes a symbolic gesture since they play in itself only can increase the teams chances of winning, but more important create energy in the crowd.

The symbolic value of both actions lies in the mutual understanding between players and crowd. Players communicates that they wanna sacrifice themselves for the sake of the team, while the crowd appreciates such actions because the sacrifice is given to the club they cheer for.

Thoughts on performance

Jarred once pointed out to how important it was to him that the Maple Leafs made a strong effort throughout 60 minutes of a game. After some questions I figured out that this meant how the Maple

Leafs played in terms of shots for and against, possession of the puck, and the general control of the flow in the game. In short if they dominate or get dominated by its opponent. One can of course say that results are way more important than “points” for style and finesse. When I asked four other informants what kind of game they preferred, all but one was in favor for a victory where you keep the other team on their backs and away from your net. The one, Adam, who obstructed with this view proclaimed that the satisfactory of winning a hard fought game was much bigger. He would also agree that it gave him deep concerns if his team won on a “bad night”, getting outplayed. What he meant by a hard fought game is naturally an intense battle where both teams perform at a high level.

Hard fought game seems to be what commentators and neutral fans, I often watched hockey by my self on my computer or on TV, would describe as a good and entertaining hockey game. The outcome is highly unpredictable, at least more so than other games, and the overall tempo is high. Both teams just wait for a mistake they can exploit. Another option here is the highly entertaining game where both defenses struggle and a lot of goals are created. Common for these courses of actions are high tension. Josh, that also like to watch games without Maple Leafs, says he like tension in games where his emotions are not involved. When Leafs play tension is painful, but also a bit ambiguous:

The games that are exciting and close all they way to third period or overtime is both the worst and the best. But because my team is usually bad and loosing it’s a shitty feeling. It’s almost like a reminder that things will not get better. Rooting for a loosing team sucks a lot of times.

What I’m trying to specify is the complex meaning around the importance of a hockey game. The fans all have a different opinion to what a good hockey game is. They look for different things, and have different favorite players. There is not a strong distinct role of good versus bad as in wrestling;

it's more a battle between different styles of playing hockey. Each team and their coaching staff apply a combination of everything that hockey is. Whether its skill, grinding, speed, physique etc.

This is imaginary as it best. Jarred creates a vision in his own head about what a perfect hockey game is like. He has one description for a game were the Leafs play, and one where who's winning doesn't matter. He creates his own carnival and define boundaries for the types of emotions he wanna feel (Bakhtin 1984).

The hockey arena: a social space

As mentioned earlier I visited three professional hockey arenas during my stay in Canada. To bring the reader closer to what I experienced first hand I would like to explain a few characterizations of the hockey arenas I visited. First of all they're all different physical buildings in different geographical areas within Canada. But they obtain the same structures, mainly since any given hockey organization have certain rules and requirements, since the place is used to play an organized game. Same rules for every unique location in other words . Like international airports all over the world, most arenas is uniformed so people from easily can find their way and recognize a certain logic. Marc Auge calls places like this a non-space (Auge 1995). Non space since they don't have identity.

Apart form then obvious similarities in construction and architecture there a few things that is worthy of mentioning. All arenas Had Jumbotrons a couple of meters above center ice. These were used to show replays, interviews with players, commercials and videos a different kinds. What separates tharenas, from non-places is in fact identity. Since hockey is a team sport, clubs rely on identity to separate from each other. History and team logos/colors is the most usual forms that maintain the unique distinctions between the arenas. There is no way to walk into a hockey arena without knowing which team that plays there. Air Canada Center, for example is covered in a lot blue, with all walls covered in history and pictures of famous players, games, coaches and

achievements. When you enter the inside of the arena it's easy to spot the rafters that are hanging down from the roof. These are either jersey's with retired numbers, or titles from regular season/playoffs. Retired jersey can not be worn by active players.

The stands can also be seen as a liminal spaces. A room where emotions, movements, behavior can be expressed towards actions that happens on the ice. The liminal quality can thus be described as an own culture within the stands, where supporter's emotions and bodily practices live their own life. Any given expressions that relates to actions on the ice are only relevant at the hockey rink. One spends about three hours in a middle point, the transition state and than travel back to the starting point when the game is done and one re-enter the streets (Turner 1988).

Bell Center

The famous Bell Center in Montreal was a particular interesting event as it was the biggest rivalry, Montreal Canadiens versus Toronto Maple Leafs, in Canada as well as the first game of the NHL season. A lockout had been going on since September and being early January its seemed that the city's inhabitants was more than ready for NHL hockey.

The day before the game I went by the stadium to see if I could catch the open practice before noon. The streets where filled with people so it didn't bother. Bell Centre can host 21000 and reports from the morning paper next day stated that the arena was full. I had been in Toronto for two weeks prior to his day. What brought me to Montreal were a couple of Australian friends who was traveling around Canada. Since I had no luck with my project in Toronto yet, I figured I could travel east and experience with my own eyes what hockey meant to people in Quebec.

Game day started when we arrived outside the Bell Center approximately 2 hours before game start. I went with two friends who knew little about hockey but had interested enough to experience a "typical" Canadian Saturday. Hockey Night in Canada, which is a TV-show at the biggest Canadian broadcaster every Saturday evening during the NHL season, had set up a big stage

outside with a famous local band warming up the crowd. We were not let in to the arena until one hour before game start so most people enjoyed music, food and other HNIC related events outside.

I had brought my camera to the game, but sadly enough it was too big and “professional”, so I wasn’t allowed to bring it with me, luckily enough they kept it for me and I got it back after the game. Most people wore the red and blue Canadiens jersey, obviously, but there were also a small minority in the blue and white Maple Leafs colors. Those few got some messages thrown at them but all in a relaxed and funny tone and nothing hostile or aggressive. The most intense proof of the rivalry between the two clubs was found at the back of one special Canadiens jersey. The guy had printed number 67 and Leafs Suck on his back. 67 (1967) stands for the last year Maple Leafs won the Stanley Cup, where Canadiens won their last in 1994.

We got seats up high but in the center so we had a pretty good view of the action that would happen on the ice. The pre game show started in about 30 minutes before game drop. The Canadiens has a motto saying “raise the torch”. And for that reason they start the season by lighting up an actual torch, transport it around the stands and finally down to the ice where current captain gets the honor of taking it to center ice. This ritual, that might remind of what happens during the Olympic Games, is an old tradition that has been practiced in over 70 years (Jenish 2009). At this certain event it started with former captains taking turns at transporting it around the stands. The lights were turned off so all we could see was the ice, the big TV screen and the lights of mobile phones taking pictures or filming.

As people recognized each captain there was a lot of noise through clapping and cheering. When Jean Beliveau, the most winning captain in club history (Jenish 2009), appeared near the entrance to the ice the noise entered a whole new level. It was certainly something really special seeing an 80 year old retired hockey player receives so much praise and noise. A lot of the fans around me could not even have seen him play as they had to be born before he even retired. Beliveau brought the torch the last few meters to Brian Gionta, current captain, who brought it to center ice in a symbolic action that showed everyone that the torch was now at home and that

hockey were to be played. Later on each player from the home club entered the ice one by one and taking turns at holding the torch at center ice.

Watching the game at the bar

Hockey bars are found everywhere in downtown Toronto. I visited plenty of them and I must say it's almost as a jungle, confirming that clichés about Toronto as a hockey mad city. There are many reasons to why hockey is consumed at bars. The first and most obvious reason are the interest for hockey in Toronto. Toronto Maple Leafs is the biggest hockey club in the world if one counts organization plus financial income/budget. In addition they have the biggest fan base, which is spread all over Canada. That is of course the biggest reason for the financial muscles (Badenhasuen 2014). As the biggest hockey market in the world, the approximately 20 000 seats at Air Canada Center are filled up almost every game, and the prices are thereafter the highest in NHL (Costello 2014). I watched one game and paid 100 dollars (ca. 600 norwegian kroner) for seats that are considered to be the second worst. That's a lot of money in my own opinion, considering the 41 home games in the regular season. My informants told me that the average canadian family can't make a trip to the ACC more than a couple of times a season. Some informants didn't bother going at all. I'll come back to some of the reasons later on.

Back to hockey bars. The typical hockey bar is a lot like the typical English football pub. They have a huge bar area highlighted with large TV screens up high, so customers can sit at a bar stole, order drinks and watch the screens at the same time. As the NHL usually organize more than one game a day it's usually possible to follow more than one game in the same bar, unless the Maple Leafs play. The modern hockey bars tend to combine TV's and bar service with restaurants areas and a simple menu of burgers, nachos, steaks etc. The only difference from restaurants is that they organize tables in booths and that every booth carry's a TV. Some bars choose to go with a

couple of big TV screens instead of booths. It is however important to notice that all bars I came across in Canada usually showed hockey. Even some of the night clubs may have a screen or two without sound from the games. What separate regular bars and a hockey bars is in my mind the customers.

When I visited a bar for the first time it was easy to figure out if customers cared for hockey or not. Hockey people doesn't necessarily wear a jersey but it's a certain type of atmosphere in hockey bars. People talked less and paid more attention to the action on the screens. The sound from the game with commentary's voice seemed important in counterpart to other bars that play music over their speakers. When Maple Leafs entered the playoffs for the first time in nine years I believe that every bar downtown aired the game. I remember walking around Queen - and Spadina Street a couple of hours before game time, watching hordes of people in white and blue colors outside every bar. It was a truly beautiful sight for a person that like sports. You could really understand how bad it must have been to wait for a playoff game.

5. CONCLUSION

This thesis have tried to show the symbolic and liminal sides of hockey. The framework si possible through shared opinions by fans and stories from a fighter. Hockey is thus seen as a liminal space where different meaning is true for every participant. The crowd seem to watch hockey for various reasons, and they all create their own memoires while attending games. Hockey is neither a ritual of open rebellion. It is a rich and complex scenario that creats many exciting outcomes. The true meaning of hockey will always remain hidden, maybe even loose its value. But one thing is for sure, hockey will never die.

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APPENDIX

Live games attended in 2013

January 19: Montreal Canadiens – Toronto Maple Leafs 1-2

February 2: Toronto Marlies – Hamilton Bulldogs 4-2

February 6 : Toronto Marlies – Hamilton Bulldogs 4-6

February 09 : Toronto Marlies – Chicago Wolves 4-2

February 10 : Toronto Marlies – Texas Stars 2-3

February 16 : Toronto Marlies – Hersey Bears 2-1

February 18 : Toronto Marlies – Houston Aeros 1-2

February 23 : Toronto Marlies – Milwaukee Admirals 1-3

February 24 : Toronto Marlies – St. John's Ice Caps 5-4

February 27 : Toronto Marlies – Rochester Americans 2-1

March 2 : Toronto Marlies – Binghamton Senators 2-4

March 6 : Toronto Marlies – Syracuse Crunch 6-3

March 9 : Toronto Marlies – Abbotsford Heat 2-4

March 10 : Toronto Marlies – Peoria Rivermen 4-1

March 13 : Toronto Marlies – Lake Erie Monsters 2-1

March 16 : Toronto Marlies – Rochester Americans 6-1

March 30 : Toronto Marlies – Abbotsford Heat 4-3

April 4 : Toronto Maple Leafs – Philadelphia Flyers 3-5

April 16 : Toronto Marlies – Oklahoma City Barons 2-1

Playoffs

April 27: Toronto Marlies – Rochester Americans 6-3

April 27: Toronto Marlies – Rochester Americans 2-0

May 10: Toronto Marlies – Grand Rapids Griffiths 0-7

May 21: Toronto Marlies – Grand Rapids Griffiths 3-4