Cultures of Resistance and Compliance:
Football Fandom and Political Engagement in Manchester

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ABSTRACT

This thesis presents an interpretative analysis of contemporary football culture in Manchester, as it encounters and reacts to significant structural transformations between the years 2003 and 2009. Of prime concern therefore is how locally constituted elements of cultural identification react to processes of globalisation and *'hyper-commodification'* (Giulianotti, 2002).

While the research field retains a relatively broad local focus on football fandom in Manchester, its core findings rest predominantly on the politicised culture observed within independently organised formations of Manchester United supporters before, during and after the club's 2005 takeover by Malcolm Glazer.

Manchester City's 2003 move from their traditional home at Maine Road, and the club's subsequent takeovers, first by Thaksin Shinawatra and more recently by the Abu Dhabi United Group, provide fascinating parallel context due mainly to the lack of oppositional organisation and discourse amongst the club's support.

This is highlighted particularly emphatically when the Manchester United supporters' 'breakaway' club FC United of Manchester is considered, although the more compliant characteristics in football fandom generally are acknowledged throughout. A critical research paradigm ensures that due consideration is taken of what Raymond Williams called the *"structuring formations"*, within which these experiences and understandings occur (Gibson, 2000: 264).

This account draws upon the researcher's immersed perspective to examine how traditional notions of authenticity are articulated and understood within English football culture. Findings in the immediate context of Manchester reveal high levels of cultural capital attached to values of loyalty and local identity, which impact significantly on attempts to mobilise supporter opposition.

The possibilities and limitations within football supporter culture for exerting meaningful resistance are therefore assessed, along with the potential for such struggles to foster wider politicised outlooks. The ambivalence of cultural engagement means that continuity and change are never far apart, with culture found to facilitate, often simultaneously, both a yearning for what might be along with a fear for what might be lost.

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PART ONE

INTRODUCTION AND CONCEPTUAL FOCUS

This section provides an introduction, as well as pertinent background context, to the research field under scrutiny along with the theory and literature that underpins and supports the analysis of findings in later chapters.

Chapter 1 introduces the thesis, setting out the key background context, terminology and events, before outlining the structure of the chapters to follow.

Chapter 2 explores in more detail the background context of football culture in Manchester, documented within a review of literature that spans the wider historical and contemporary developments of the English football industry. Theoretically underpinning much of these discussions are notions of globalisation, local identity and exclusion.

Chapter 3 reviews the core sociological theory with which findings and observations are critically analysed. Cultural Studies and Social Movement literature provide the main basis of discussion, which assesses the role of culture in society, in light of sociological debates around notions such as ideology, habitus, consumption, fandom, individualisation, community, power and resistance.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Of primary concern in this thesis are the social and cultural factors that variously facilitate and constrain the development of politicised resistance amongst football supporters in Manchester. In recent years, supporters of both Manchester United and Manchester City football clubs have experienced significant transformations related to processes of globalisation, and specifically the 'hyper-commodification' of elite levels of club football (Giulianotti, 2002).

These changes are widely viewed as having a detrimental effect on the supporters' ability, both financially and practically, to continue the forms of fandom on which the values and meanings of their supporter culture are largely based (Conn, 1997; Brown, 1998a; King, 1998; Giulianotti, 2002). Nevertheless, traditional ideas of authenticity – notably around notions of loyalty and local identity – continue to underpin supporter discourse as supporters come to terms with various challenges and transformations.

This thesis sets out to present findings and theoretical critique of the different ways that fans have negotiated their own understandings, and therefore responses, to these changes. The continued hegemony of traditional notions of authentic fandom is presented here as a decisive field of contestation as various forms of supporter resistance are contemplated and either acted out, or rejected.

It can be observed that while the majority of supporters have been largely compliant in accepting the transformations, albeit with varying degrees of enthusiasm or dismay, meaningful resistance has been made a reality. Such processes carry implications not only for the supporters' cultural identifications, but also for the potential of such struggles to foster ongoing, and wider, political engagement.

A core aim therefore is to critically assess the role played by various elements of local cultural affiliation in particular, and wider social processes more generally, in determining these disparate supporter reactions. In line with the weight of empirical evidence, analysis of more resistant formations retains a heavier focus on the independent supporter culture at Manchester United. The researcher's position of immersed, participant observer within that

cultural sphere is significant, and accordingly is the focus of considerable reflection.

The campaign of resistance by Manchester United supporters against their club's takeover by Malcolm Glazer in 2005, and the subsequent emergence of fan-owned Football Club United of Manchester, therefore provides the core source of empirical data. Responses of Manchester City supporters to their club's move in 2003 from its traditional Maine Road home to a new stadium, as well as two club takeovers, in 2007 and 2009, remain of key significance throughout.

This introductory chapter briefly documents the key social, cultural and political context of the takeover of Manchester United Football Club in 2005. Widening to a slightly broader, yet still local context of the city of Manchester between 2003 and 2009, the above-mentioned transformations undergone by Manchester City Football Club during this time are also introduced. Following the setting of this background context, the chapter concludes by outlining the thesis structure, along with signposts to the central themes of the remaining chapters.

Notes on Terminology

Throughout the thesis reference is made interchangeably to both *supporters* and *fans*. While generally the former term can suggest a more active role, in most instances no special significance is attached to the application of either term, which tend to be respectively used to avoid repetition rather than the assignation of any particular value. Occasionally terms such as *spectators* or *followers* may be used, and these may carry clearer connotations of more passive forms of engagement, which would be apparent from the context of their use.

Occasionally, such as when discussing established classificatory systems, more emphatic use of such terms would be denoted by the use of inverted commas. This is evident for instance where Richard Giulianotti's 'taxonomy of spectator identities' is critiqued, which assigns specific characteristics to the terms 'supporters', 'fans', 'followers' and 'flaneurs' (Giulianotti, 2002). Broader terms such as *customers* or *consumers* would be more appropriate when, for instance, characterising the commercially driven view clubs or authorities may have of the people who attend or watch games.

Football clubs are given their full names where discussions initially begin, after which a shortened version of the club name may be used in order to avoid cumbersome passages. For

instance, Manchester United Football Club and Manchester City Football Club are discussed in great length throughout. In passages where the focus is clearly on this 'Mancunian' football context, the terms *United* and *City* may occasionally be used. The suffix of 'Football Club' therefore tends not to be used in general discussion once the full name has been established.

The term 'Mancunian' is an adjective or 'demonym' relating to the city of Manchester, and can be used to refer to people, dialect, culture or organisations that represent or emanate from the city. Occasionally therefore, reference is made to Mancunian football culture, or fans' identification as Mancunians.

The words 'Football Club' carry more conscious connotations where it is used a prefix for Football Club United of Manchester. Generally though, the name FC United of Manchester would be used when initially referring to the club, then shortened where appropriate to *FC United*. Likewise, the English Football Association may occasionally be referred to as *The FA* when used within a clear context of English football governance. Similarly, references to other organisations or structures should be presumed to be in the English context except where stated otherwise.

The notions of *authenticity* and *tradition* also require a note of explanation, as each are referred to regularly throughout the thesis. While the contingent and contested nature of each is acknowledged, and indeed has convinced some academics to avoid using such terminology, the importance placed on notions of the authentic and the traditional within football supporter culture, which it should be remembered is the field of values and meanings under scrutiny, means that it would be a remarkable omission, as well as almost impossible, to fail to include them as central points of reference in the thesis.

Where these concepts do appear however, the qualification should always be borne in mind that their inclusion does not infer an academically or historically grounded acceptance of their veracity, but that they are above all concepts that actively shape the identity formation and value systems within the very real cultural world of those in the research field.

Background: Local Context

In May 2005 the American businessman Malcolm Glazer became the majority shareholder in Manchester United Plc, very much against the will of many of the club's supporters and shareholders. Within two months he had successfully purchased over 98% of the company's shares, and as the club's new owner he promptly removed it from the stock market, forcing a compulsory buyout of the holdings of any remaining 'dissenting' shareholders.

Manchester United had been floated on the stock exchange in 1991, having existed as a privately owned football club since its formation in 1878. Many questions had been raised throughout its fourteen years as a publicly listed company, particularly concerning what many saw as an inherent conflict of interest between those of a football club as a community institution, and those of a publicly accountable company with a primary obligation to produce profitable dividends for its financial stakeholders (Conn 1997; Brown and Walsh 1999).

The primary *community* stakeholders - the club's supporters - had never had anything more than an emotional stake in the club until the opportunity arose in 1991 to purchase a tangible say in the running of the club. Securing anything more than a token shareholding however, proved beyond the financial reach of the majority of supporters, who on the whole saw nothing more from their small shareholdings than a souvenir certificate and an opportunity to attend company AGMs.

In October 1998, media baron Rupert Murdoch's satellite broadcasting company BSkyB had launched a takeover bid for the club which was eventually blocked by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, following pressure from a well organised independent supporters' campaign who lobbied MPs into challenging the move on grounds of unfair competition (see Brown and Walsh, 1999).

Manchester United's more politically engaged supporters, mainly via the Independent Manchester United Supporters' Association (IMUSA)[1] and independently-produced fanzines Red Issue and United We Stand, remained vehemently opposed to any takeover of the club. While they had consistently viewed its PLC status as a far from perfect situation (Brown, 2007), they feared the dubious motives of any prospective buyers seeking to take the club

[1] IMUSA was set up in 1995 as an independent campaigning vehicle, tackling a range of supporter issues that were becoming of increasing concern to fans at this time.

into private hands and away from public accountability.

Following the scare of Murdoch's takeover bid, fans were urged to buy shares in the club and entrust them to Shareholders United (SU)[2] - an organisation set up by fans with the aim of pooling together supporter-owned shares to provide them with the power necessary to block any future takeover attempts, and with an ultimate ambition to be in a position to give the fans a controlling stake themselves.

The high market value of the company however, meant that despite growing numbers of supporters buying up small amounts of shares, which greatly accelerated once the Glazer takeover became a serious proposition (in excess of 32,000 individual shareholding members by the time the takeover went ahead), the fans were not in a strong enough position to prevent it.

A number of high-profile demonstrations had taken place from October 2004 when it became clear that a bid was highly likely, which although keeping the issue in the media spotlight and drawing widespread support from the club's fan base and beyond, failed to deter Glazer from pressing ahead with his purchase.

Protest marches outside Old Trafford on match days included banners and chants proclaiming that the fans wouldn't allow the club to be sold. *"United United, Not For Sale"* was the most common vocal refrain, along with banners and leaflets carrying the message *'No Customers, No Profits'*, urging fans to boycott club merchandise. A burning effigy of Malcolm Glazer outside Old Trafford also left observers in no doubt as to the welcome this potential new owner could expect.

Away from the stadium, protesting fans 'flashmobbed' the city centre stores of sponsors Nike, Vodafone and Ladbrokes, as well as the offices of Glazer's financial advisors NM Rothschild, gate-crashed a UEFA executive meeting at Manchester City's new ground to question that organisation's stewardship of the sport in Europe, and Manchester to date remains adorned with stickers bearing a slogan which is now a ubiquitous element of fan

[2] SU grew out of existing attempts to mobilise supporter shareholdings (via IMUSA's 'Share Club') at the time of the Murdoch takeover attempt in 1998, and formed initially under the name 'Shareholders United Against Murdoch' (SUAM). Following the 2005 takeover by Glazer and the club's removal from the stock exchange, the name was again changed - now that there could be no supporter shareholders - to become the Manchester United Supporters Trust (MUST).

discourse: *'Love United, Hate Glazer'*[3]. This slogan can be seen as a campaign-specific extension of the *'love the team, hate the club'* sentiment which had gained prominence within Manchester United's independent supporter culture throughout the 1990s and beyond.

Although the strength of these protests may have given the impression that the majority of Manchester United supporters had been in fierce opposition, once the takeover went ahead many supporters failed to see the purpose in continuing protests against the club's new owners. The general consensus amongst fans was that they must now get on with their traditionally defined role in support of the club, whatever its ownership status. Private ownership was after all the state the club had been in for the vast majority of its history, and certainly from the 1960s onwards the club's owners had regularly courted controversy and been far from popular amongst United's support (see Crick and Smith 1989; Conn 1997).

Likewise, football supporters in Britain had never had any democratic representation in key decision making processes, and had arguably developed a fatalistic culture of deference towards what I argue to be an uncritical conception of 'the club', which in turn further empowered the club owners to exploit the 'captive audiences' they enjoyed (Conn, 1997).

Experiences of recent years however had resulted in the development of a more politicised and often militant element among Manchester United's support, and many of these fans had no intention of continuing in this subservient role under what they saw as Glazer's occupation of 'their' football club. It was this defiance that paved the way for boycotting supporters to form Football Club United of Manchester, a development that raises complex questions around the role played by cultural affiliations and identifications in maintaining or disrupting hierarchies of power.

Formed in the image of the club these fans wanted Manchester United to be, FC United is a democratically structured co-operative, with each member having an equal say in the direction the club takes, notably at annual board elections. Its constitution, voted on by its founder members along with the club name and club crest, laid out a vision for a football

[3] The sentiments behind the slogan *'Love United, Hate Glazer'* become more apparent when the post-takeover cultural fallout within Manchester United supporter culture is considered. The fans' boycott, and particularly the setting up of FC United as an alternative for those boycotting supporters, led some non-boycotting fans to equate anti-Glazer protests with being against the club. This slogan then was adopted as a clear message that it was possible to oppose the owners while remaining devoted to the club - in fact, for the boycotting fans, it was considered a necessity.

club with strong, meaningful community links which would never put commercial concerns ahead of those of its match-going supporters. Having started life ten divisions below the English Premiership, FC United claim to provide a regular, accessible football experience for those Manchester United fans who now refuse, or can not afford, to attend games at Old Trafford[4].

The tactic of maintaining an imaginary separation between what they see as 'their' Manchester United and those in charge of the club had by the time of the takeover become a ubiquitous feature of United's independent supporter culture. The *'love the team, hate the club'* concept prefigured the *'Love United, Hate Glazer'* slogan by around a decade, and as observations discussed in later chapters show, seemed to provide a precedent for some which backed up a decision to continue the 'compromised' physical and financial support for Manchester United once Glazer had taken charge. For others however, the transformative journey they had experienced - most notably during the anti-Glazer takeover protests but also through previous campaigns - served to convince them that this kind of compromise was no longer tenable. These supporters now demanded a different, less submissive, kind of relationship with their club.

The nineties-vintage *'love the team, hate the club'* rhetoric was continuing to morph into more complex forms. For those fans now boycotting any active support of Manchester United, even the *'Love United, Hate Glazer'* slogan failed to accurately describe their Manchester United-supporting perspective; instead perhaps an outlook of *'love the history, hate the present'* may be more accurate. For them, it is the shared memories as well as ongoing bonds with what they see as an intangible 'spirit' or 'soul' of Manchester United, that has legitimated their decision to break the cultural habit of a lifetime.

For followers of FC United therefore, cultural identification with their football club was decisively important in saying something - to themselves as well as to others - about who they were and who they wanted to be. Marx conceived of culture as an endeavour which goes far beyond satiating immediate physical needs, and represents a way that man can potentially become a 'species-being', thereby able to *"look at his image in a world he has*

[4] The idea of a 'breakaway' club owned by Manchester United supporters had first been muted in the *Red Issue* fanzine around the time of the Murdoch takeover bid, yet continued to receive little credibility amongst United's support even as the Glazer takeover battle reached its climax. It was only in the realisation that those who had committed to a boycott were to be left isolated and powerless in their relatively small numbers, that the positive and concrete steps to form FC United began to gain momentum.

created" (cited in Bauman, 1999: 135). The men and women who refused to continue the cultural and political compromise of 'being' a Manchester United supporter while seeing less and less of themselves in 'their' club, now had created out of their own culture an institution inscribed with their own values, that they could look at and truly say *"we own that, that's ours"* (Jules Spencer, FC United Board Member 26/09/05).

While Manchester United's supporters were experiencing major turmoil, Manchester City were also undergoing significant transformations. In 2003, the club moved away from its traditional home at Maine Road, into a brand-new stadium that had been built for the Commonwealth Games held in the city a year previously. The club were then bought by Thailand's former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra in 2007, and subsequently by the Abu Dhabi United group in 2009.

The reaction of Manchester City supporters to these changes was quite different to that of Manchester United's more militant and independent fan groups. Like the more compliant wider fanbase at Manchester United, the fans of Manchester City did not seek to oppose or resist the changes, and if anything displayed a great deal of enthusiasm predicated on the benefits these transformations were expected to bring (Andrews, 2008; Edensor and Millington, 2010).

Later chapters explore in depth the cultural background and significance of these diverse fan reactions in Manchester. Of key concern are the different ways both sets of supporters had come to view their relationship with those that own or run their football club, which itself was based to some extent on discourses of cultural authenticity that permeate the fans' identifications with their respective clubs, and with the city of Manchester. The prior establishment of independently organised formations within Manchester United's supporter culture is a related and crucial development that is explored in more detail in Chapter 7, along with attempts by Manchester City supporters to do likewise.

The key implications of these developments for this thesis rest on how the vital structuring notion of authenticity, manifested most prominently within football supporter culture in discourses of loyalty and local identity, can be linked to fan responses to the transformations they experienced. The compliant and the resistant formations observed suggest that the possibilities for an empowered fandom exist, though sitting as it does alongside the more constraining elements of supporter culture, this potential is unlikely to avail itself without a

radical re-imagining of what kind of relationship fans wish to have with what they, after all, regard as 'their' clubs.

Thesis Structure

Following this introductory chapter, **Part One** continues with two chapters that review key literature on the historical and contemporary context that underpin the issues, debates and analyses of later chapters. This begins in Chapter 2 by critically exploring academic debates stemming from the growing range of research into the historical development of English football and also more specifically, that of Mancunian football culture. Of particular relevance are the contemporary transformations associated with processes of globalisation, and the free market environment in which this has taken place.

Chapter 3 considers sociological debates on the role of culture, and particularly popular culture, in society. This includes a critical assessment of the potential within culture for meaningfully resisting dominant or hegemonic structures of meaning, and takes in key cultural studies and social movement literature. The effects of the transformations detailed in the preceding chapter on such social and cultural processes are naturally of prime concern.

Part Two consists of two chapters that focus on the methods employed in the production of empirical data for this thesis. Chapter 4 critically reviews core theory and key debates in research methods, providing a theoretical framework, as well as a reflexive critique, that aims to both support and justify the methods employed.

Chapter 5 provides an in-depth review of the actual research methods and sources utilised, and details how the theoretical basis of my ontological and epistemological approach actually played out in the research field. Indicative ethnographic field accounts are included here to illustrate some of the key methodological issues encountered.

In both Parts One and Two, where appropriate, references are made to analyses and descriptions of events and situations that are covered in greater depth in later chapters. The purpose of the chapters in these first two sections therefore is to set the context, in terms of events observed, supporting theory and methods employed, while providing telling insights into the findings, observations and conclusions that make up the core chapters later in the thesis.

Parts Three and Four represent the main empirical chapters of the thesis. Working within the conceptual and theoretical focus already established, analyses in these chapters build upon core themes and debates which underpin attempts to understand the character and nature of contemporary culture and society, such as globalisation, consumerism, identity, community, individualisation and social movements.

Part Three primarily considers the reasons for supporter compliance with, or resistance to, transformations experienced in Manchester's football supporter culture: transformations which are, according to traditional football culture discourse, as well as that observed during this research project, broadly conceived as having a detrimental effect on cultural activities and participation (Conn, 1997; King, 1997a, 1997b, 1998; Brown, 1998a, 1998b; Lee, 1998; Hamil et al., 2000; Giulianotti, 2002).

Chapter 6 explores the more compliant elements of football supporter culture by first setting the historical context of English football's avowedly apolitical culture. Recent transformations, including a more commercial and corporate approach by football clubs, are then explored. Particular focus is placed on both Manchester United's and Manchester City's relationship with their fans, and with notions of identity, culture and power in mind, how this relationship has come to be perceived by both club and fans within this environment is of prime concern.

Supporters' attempts to organise a means with which to voice their views on, and perhaps to mount resistance to, how their clubs and football in general are being run, provide the focus in Chapter 7. The independent fanzine and supporter campaign movement is therefore of prime concern here. The implications of these developments, for both Manchester United and Manchester City fans in attempts to oppose recent transformations, are then assessed.

FC United of Manchester is the focus of **Part Four**. The founding principles and rationale of this new football club are explored in Chapter 8, alongside critical accounts of some of the problems these boycotting Manchester United fans have experienced in attempting to balance their cultural affiliations with their political convictions.

Chapter 9 utilises FC United fans' autobiographical accounts of their 'journey' to FC United, in order to contemplate the social, cultural, political and personal factors which led different people to become supporter-owners of this radical new football club.

Chapter 10, as the concluding chapter, appropriately seeks to reprise the core themes detailed in earlier chapters in light of the empirical findings and observations analysed in Parts Three and Four. Ultimately, this chapter aims to assess what the research has achieved and the ways in which the findings might progress academic debate. The potential for further research into areas not within the bounds of this thesis are also considered.

CHAPTER 2

THE LOCAL AND THE GLOBAL: ENGLISH AND MANCUNIAN FOOTBALL CULTURE

This chapter provides a contextual review of English football culture in general, with a more particular focus on the local context of football fandom in Manchester. In so doing, influential literature and previous research is reviewed. Wider sociological theory is necessarily also considered, particularly through debates around globalisation, local identity, cultural assets and social exclusion.

English Football Culture and Global Capital

As part of an industry, and a nation, whose structures and interests are explicitly reliant on (and of course are themselves a driver of) the ebbs and flows of global capital – or 'the way of the world' as many consider it with shrugged shoulders – Manchester United Football Club had come to be viewed by many as a commodity, and by the summer of 2005 had been traded as such. That football clubs are largely understood by their fans through notions of *community* or *culture*, that are potentially in direct opposition to the less idealistic drivers of global capitalism, appears to be of little concern to those who view English football clubs as a phenomenon from which to make, or more accurately increase, their fortune.

With their club now firmly entrenched within a global, corporate and commodified environment, issues linked with local identity, cultural capital and authenticity were the focus of heightened reflexivity within Manchester United supporters' discourse - perhaps not surprisingly at a time when these values were seen as being most under threat. Such concerns however had surfaced long before the 2005 takeover by Malcolm Glazer.

Throughout the 1990s, English football's heightened popularity within a wider range of social circles (Conn, 1997) served to disrupt many traditionally held notions around English football culture, and undoubtedly laid the foundations from which the game would grow into an industry worthy of the attention of prospective investors such as Glazer. Indeed, it was this burgeoning value of the English football product that had convinced Rupert Murdoch to launch his ultimately doomed bid for Manchester United in 1998 (Brown and Walsh, 1999).

An awareness of these developments in the club's recent history is crucial in understanding the supporter culture which existed then and now amongst Manchester United fans.

Local Identity

Football clubs in England are traditionally both physically and symbolically linked to a particular place, as evidenced by the club names which with very few exceptions bear the name of the town or city, or part of a city, in which the club is based. Although there are studies which show that clubs have long garnered support from outside their immediate locale, often from as far back as the early decades of the twentieth century (Mellor, 1999), there is little doubt that recent decades have seen English football, particularly at the top levels of the game, become the subject of a great deal more debate concerning what is seen as the diminishing role of football clubs as authentic symbols or representatives of traditional local identifications (Mason, 1980; Dunning et al., 1988; Williams and Wagg, 1991; Taylor, 1992; Horton, 1997; Redhead, 1997; Giulianotti, 1999; Hamil et al., 2000).

This has been particularly exacerbated in the light of many clubs' increasingly global aspirations (Brown, 1998b; King, 1998; Giulianotti, 2002; Crabbe and Brown, 2004; Andrews, 2004), which have pushed English football to the forefront of the game's commodification since the early 1990's (Conn, 1997). During this time, football has emerged as the most globalised of all sports, particularly through its relationship with global media and communications technologies (Boyle and Haynes, 2004; Giulianotti and Robertson, 2004).

These globalising tendencies have created new audiences locally, nationally and globally. This has led to some dislocation of 'traditional' (i.e., long-standing and/or local) fans' sense of selves in relation the club (Brown, 1998a; King, 1997a, 1998), a pattern identified in Giulianotti's (2002) taxonomy of spectator identities which is critically analysed in Chapter 9. Within these new and traditional forms of consumption, notions of locality and the city, and popular culture's place within them, are played out. Often, within this heavily mediated and commodified cultural form, notions of authenticity - which in the case of Manchester in particular, rely heavily on a sense of belonging to the city - are raised, and ultimately have the potential to question many widely held notions of globalisation's characteristics and consequences.

In such instances, it is important to avoid falling into the tempting trap of automatically

imbuing the past with those traits that are perceived to be missing in contemporary contexts. While English football certainly owes much of its early and subsequent development to strong local identifications (Mason, 1980; Taylor, 1992; Russell, 1997; Walvin, 2000), the influence of commerce, the exploitation of supporters' loyalty and even early forms of globalisation have always to some extent characterised football. From its codification in the late 19th Century, through its rapid growth in popularity especially amongst the workers of Britain's industrial towns and cities, and the game's export along imperial trade routes (Mason, 1995), football then can be seen to contain many of the features that are seen as major threats now;

> *"The atrophy of community and the sharp division from the natural environment leaves a void when it comes to the 'free' hours. Thus filling of the time away from the job also becomes dependent on the market, which develops to an enormous degree those passive amusements, entertainments, and spectacles that suit the restricted circumstances of the city and are offered as substitutes for life itself. Since they become the means of filling all the hours of 'free' time, they flow profusely from corporate institutions which have transformed every means of entertainment and 'sport' into a production process for the enlargement of capital"*
>
> (Harry Braverman, 1974: 278)

The largely apolitical history of football fandom in England, around which much of the above transformations have taken place, is documented in Chapter 6. Partly by comparing the English football context with those established in more consciously active politicised cultures in different parts of the world, that chapter attempts to make sense of the compliant character which still appears to dominate English football supporter culture. Later chapters of course document and analyse potential breaks from that tradition.

Manchester's football context

The complex and often inconsistent relationships between the public images and corporate policies of Manchester's two main football clubs provide an interesting example of the potential conflicts when 'the global' meets 'the local'. Manchester United are recognised as a leader in terms of global corporate operations and the club is openly branded as a 'global' product. Manchester City have also begun moves towards a more commodified and global operation, partly evidenced by the 2003 move from their traditional Maine Road 'home' to a newly built, more financially beneficial stadium[5], as well as by the club's 2007 takeover by

[5] For an in-depth analysis of this move, including considerations of the effects on supporters and local communities around both sites, see Brown et al. (2006). See also Penny and Redhead (2009), as well as Edensor and Millington (2010), both of which present accounts of the cultural sense of loss experienced by Manchester City fans following this move.

Thailand's former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, and more recently still the takeover by the Abu Dhabi United group in 2009. At the same time, City continue to explicitly brand themselves as Manchester's traditional, 'local' club (Brown, 2004; Edensor and Millington, 2008).

Manchester United, as the best supported, most well-known, and during this time the most successful club in playing and commercial terms, found themselves at the centre of most debates regarding the state of football nationally as well as locally from the early 1990s onwards. Manchester United supporters then had perceived their local identity and traditional fan culture to be under threat long before the 2005 Glazer takeover (King, 1997a).

As the transformations mentioned above took hold of English football throughout the 1990s, the particularly extreme form of commercialisation undertaken by Manchester United led to a great deal of criticism of the club from its own supporters. Whereas they were enjoying the most successful period in the club's history, an imaginary schism had developed in the minds of many United supporters between the team and those who controlled the club – hence the well-used phrase within independent Manchester United fan culture of *'love the team - hate the club'* (King 1998; Brown 2004).

As supporters of this equally loved and hated club (see Mellor, 2004), Manchester United fans became targets for a great deal of derision from rival fans, as well as from sections of the media. Much of this ridicule, and often contempt, was centred on a feeling that Manchester United fans lacked authenticity - their credibility as loyal football supporters was being called into question, with a particular focus placed on notions of locality. Manchester United fans from outside of Manchester were widely mocked, and a commonly-held stereotype of Manchester United fans being from anywhere other than Manchester became well known and readily accepted within football culture and beyond (Brick, 2001; Brown, 2004).

In the immediate footballing culture of Manchester, the focus on locality was at its most intense, with supporters of rivals Manchester City regularly staking a sole claim for 'ownership' of, or 'belonging' to, the city. Chants of *'do you come from Manchester?'* were regularly heard from City fans at derby matches between the two clubs (this chant also became a staple of other rival fans in matches against Manchester United). Mocking references were made to United's vast overseas support, as in the example of the City fans'

taunt *'you're the pride of Singapore'*, and this became a regular theme within fan discourse, from the songs sung and banners displayed in the stadium, banter in the pubs and in the articles and letters of fanzines, as well as in more mainstream media (Brown, 2004; Crabbe and Brown 2004).

David Hand's (2001) article on 'new' football writing reveals the extent of such popular characterisations, with one journalist commenting that *"(while) their Stretford neighbours attract capricious lightweights, City fans are true [people] of steel, cut from character-building torment"* with Manchester City itself enjoying *"a reputation for being a football club with a 'good heart' that serves the local community from which it draws most of its support"* (Hand, 2001: 107).

Manchester City FC's official marketing initiatives have explicitly reflected the club's claimed credentials as *the* authentic Manchester club, a trend highlighted by a 2006 campaign consisting of billboards placed around Manchester bearing slogans such as *"This Is Our City"* and *"Réal Manchester"* set against City's club colours (Burrell 2005; Porter 2005 and 2008; Edensor and Millington 2008). Manchester City's aims to be seen as *"The Manchester Club"* (MCFC, 2004) were highlighted in a 2004 interview given by Manchester City Chief Executive Alistair Mackintosh to the Manchester Evening News, in which the prospect of a Glazer-owned Manchester United was clearly relished. A widely held view that the American bidder would seek to expand United's global operations in order to generate his profit, represented for Mackintosh a potential scenario whereby United *"becomes more remote from its heartland and City increasingly becomes a focal point of Manchester life"* (Feddy, 2004: 9).

Reflecting almost word-for-word his club's marketing literature (MCFC, 2004), Mackintosh described *"the City brand"* as representing *"a confident attitude, whose supporters are down-to-earth, passionate, genuine, loyal, have a sense of humour, are progressive and enterprising"*, before adding that *"the profile is exceptionally closely matched to that of a Mancunian, as opposed to coming from London and perhaps being perceived as being a glory-hunter"* (Feddy, 2004: 9). Very similar sentiments were expressed in a personal interview with City's Marketing and Communications Manager Ian Howard, in contrast to the more openly global aspirations confirmed via interview discussion with Phil Townsend, the Director of Communication at Manchester United, both of which are considered further in Chapter 6.

An example of how such characterisations of Manchester United and Manchester City fans have become a common-sense element of the mainstream discourse of football culture can be seen in a Guardian newspaper match report of City's final game at their Maine Road stadium in 2003. The reporter describes fans who had travelled *"from America, Japan, Australia, Scandinavia, the Netherlands, Germany and Ireland* (as well as) *India* (and) *10 young ladies from China known as the Beijing Blues, who made it to Moss Side"*, before - clearly not wishing to risk his report providing any counter-intuitive observations - adding *"and this being the blue side of Manchester, many also walked the few hundred yards from the nearby houses"* (Collins, 2003: 1).

In response to such challenges to their credibility as both authentic football supporters and as Mancunians, Manchester United supporters have been observed as displaying a re-assertion of their local identity (King 1998; Crabbe and Brown 2004), partly through a re-intensification of their rivalry with City, a reaction described by Brown as being variously linked to Appadurai's (1996) concept of *"creating cultural difference to the 'other'"* as well as to Roland Robertson's (1992) work on 'glocalisation' (Brown, 2004: 8).

I would also add to this Ulrich Beck's re-characterisation of Robertson's 'glocal' - that of the 'rooted cosmopolitan' (Beck, 2002: 36), which in this context describes particularly accurately the reflexively non-parochial sensibilities prevalent in Manchester United independent supporter discourse. Indeed, Brown recognises such a trend when he talks of the overlapping feelings of pride, pragmatism, embarrassment and cultural concern within Mancunian football culture as fans witness their club operating on an increasingly global, corporate stage (Brown, 2004). Any temptation therefore to presume that exposure to 'the global' would produce stock cultural effects locally, is quickly quashed when the dynamics and flexibility of such cultures are observed.

This lack of a unidirectional relationship between cause and effect, as opposed to the commonly held comprehension of the all-powerful global bearing down on the hapless local, was also highlighted in Michael Veseth's 2005 critique of globalisation's multifarious consequences on the world of football. Particularly relevant here is Veseth's assertion that *"...the net effect of soccer globalization may be to strengthen local identity in opposition to whatever global forces may be weakening it"* (Veseth, 2005: 110). His stress on 'whatever global forces' is interesting, due to its implicit recognition that globalisation is indeed a

panoply of converging flows, with capital - and capitalism - representing just one, albeit highly dominant, part of that. When we talk of people being threatened by globalisation therefore, it is important to bear in mind that it is generally a particular element, or perhaps character, of those global forces that cause any attendant social or cultural problems.

Giulianotti's (2002) support for such a perspective, which he also links to the work of Robertson (1992) as well as Scholte's (2000) views on 'supraterritoriality', adds further weight to the conviction that globalisation as a process isn't in itself to blame for the problems experienced by its more grounded victims. Giulianotti explains that the *"...problem arises through the specific hegemony of neoliberal practices and ideologies in underwriting the structural textures of global disorganized capitalism and its differentially experienced, socially divisive, everyday consequences"* (2002: 30).

The inclusion here of notions of 'hegemony' and 'ideology' naturally invokes the insights of Antonio Gramsci, who articulated so well the cultural elements that traditional Marxism is often all-too-simplistically criticised as passing over in its perceived economic reductionism. By adopting something of a Gramscian perspective then, it is clear to see that even those who impose society's dominant structures are unable to guarantee the effects they desire. Because there needs to be some degree of consent by 'the people', rather than merely fearful compliance, the sheer dynamics of social and cultural life ensures that acceptance of these structures is always in some ways negotiated.

The ebbs and flows of globalisation, and its perhaps postmodern refusal to impart easily readable, let alone predictable, patterns of cause and effect, also means that even seemingly optimistic observers like Veseth, who stated above his view that local identity can and does prosper in the face of globalisation, are forced to observe that *"...the relationship between global economics and local culture is like a mousetrap, delicate and dangerous…I'd like to say that global soccer strengthens local identity, but I worry that it just isn't so"* (Veseth, 2005: 110).

What Veseth concedes here is that while we will always find examples of opposition and resistance, whether politically or culturally motivated, consciously or otherwise, that doesn't mean we should imply - ala Fiske or de Certeau - a victory for culture over economic structure. Such resistance is often made up of people simply making the best out of a situation they didn't wish for, or in Marxist language they are attempting to make their own

history, albeit not in the conditions of their own choosing. They must therefore adapt in an attempt to either preserve or hang on to what they see as slipping away, while also perhaps reaching for something novel, often even appropriating elements of the offending force to help shape their attempts at preservation, resistance and development.

Globalisation, Commodification, Ownership

The term 'globalisation' can and has been used to refer to a great many aspects and characteristics of the contemporary world. In beginning to position the particular traits and effects which are of prime concern in this research, it may be helpful initially to consider a broad definition such as that provided by John Tomlinson who states that in a general sense, the term 'globalisation' *"refers to the rapidly developing process of complex interconnections between societies, cultures, institutions and individuals worldwide"* (cited in Street, 2001: 170).

While the cultural and political concerns under scrutiny in this thesis are in some ways the result of the broad process described by Tomlinson, clearly it would be too simplistic to leave it at that, as Giulianotti (2002) recognised in tracing the origins of much contemporary social and cultural unrest experienced locally to the specific 'neoliberal hegemony' that has come to dominate interactions between the local and the global. This perspective is mirrored in Beck's (2002) concept, introduced above, of the 'rooted cosmopolitan', likened in this context to the rejection within Manchester United's independent supporter culture of parochial sensibilities that would shun non-local interactions, in favour of a more culturally cosmopolitan (yet with high levels of cultural capital placed on locality) and often politically radical outlook.

The globalisation of English football, and Manchester United in particular, has clearly had significant impacts not only upon the marketing direction taken by the commodified 'product', but also upon those 'consumers' operating within the complex dynamics of supporter culture. Ironically, though perhaps on reflection not entirely surprisingly, the club primarily seen as being at the forefront of English football's globalisation, and whose supporters are routinely derided as exemplifying the non-local, inauthentic face of global football culture, is the club within whose fan culture the most vehement opposition to such transformations have been observed.

Cultural assets and regulation

The level of feeling amongst Manchester United supporters regarding transformations experienced in recent years, that they continue to see as a threat to their cultural identity, raises important questions in terms of how cultural institutions and practices might be protected, if at all. Although the legal and political system in which the UK football industry operates largely precludes interventions in what are seen as private trading matters, there are some areas in which government or governing body regulations prevent football, other sports and cultural 'assets' from being totally at the mercy of the free market economy.

Issues such as debt levels, financial solvency, public access and television deals are to some extent subject to regulation from various bodies, and indeed the attempt to purchase Manchester United by Rupert Murdoch's BSkyB in 1998 was ultimately blocked by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission on the grounds of unfair competition, although tellingly much of the concern which decided the outcome of the commission focused on the media industry rather than the future of football governance (Brown and Walsh, 1999).

Attempts then are occasionally made to protect what are seen as national, cultural or sporting assets in certain cases, although in the case of Malcolm Glazer's takeover, no regulatory procedures or systems were in place to challenge what was, after all, a perfectly legal transaction, and any adverse effects felt by involved parties were not within the remit of concern for either the Football Association, Premier League, UEFA, FIFA or the UK Government. In fact, the only organisation that declared an interest in the proceedings with regard to potential intervention was the American National Football League who expressed concern that as the owners of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, the Glazer family were possibly jeopardising the financial stability of one of its member clubs by committing so much capital to a new business venture (Griffiths, 2005).

One area of regulation that existed in English football until relatively recently, which would have prevented both Murdoch and Glazer from launching their takeover bids from the outset, and indeed would have prevented Manchester United from trading itself on the stock market in the first place, was the now defunct FA Rule 34. This rule essentially prevented football clubs from being used as a means to make money for investors by limiting the payment of dividends, something which was foreseen as a potential threat to the game, and its role in the wider community, at the time it was introduced by the Football Association in the late 19th Century (Conn, 1997).

So for the best part of 100 years, football clubs were regulated to protect their community stakeholders against the perils of market forces, thus *"ensuring that clubs remain sporting institutions"* (Conn, 1997: 41). Tottenham Hotspur Football Club however, sidestepped Rule 34 in 1983 by restructuring themselves and making the football club a mere subsidiary of a larger holding company (Tottenham Hotspur PLC), which was not technically subject to the FA's rules. The Football Association's acquiescence in allowing such a fundamental rule to be disregarded by one of its member clubs allowed Manchester United to follow suit in 1991, when as a PLC it was able to pay huge dividends to its directors following flotation on the stock exchange.

This circumvention of Rule 34, and more pointedly the willingness of the game's governing body to allow football clubs to be traded as commercial concerns at the expense of more cultural and community-based stakeholders, created the environment in which Malcolm Glazer was later able to purchase Manchester United, and go on to saddle the club with close to half a billion pounds of debt (and rising), despite the overwhelming opposition of the club's supporters, as well as the more fleeting opposition of some of the club's more well known directors and employees.

The very real fear of the supporters therefore, was that the club, operating as it was, and still is, with no public accountability and within what appear to be very transient and flexible industry regulations, will be run with only one ultimate objective - to make money for its owners. It is of little consolation that a successful team is likely to be a necessity for the club to be profitable, particularly as the revenue streams most readily available for exploitation are those supplied by the supporters themselves. For the Manchester United supporters, enjoying the match day experience and supporting their team had always been an end in itself, and without the regulation that protected this cultural domain for so long, their support has now become merely the means from which the club's owners will seek profit.

<u>Manchester: global exposure, local distinction</u>

> *"The local…is an arena where various people's habits of meaning intersect, and where the global, or what has been local somewhere else, also has some chance of making itself at home. At this intersection, things are forever working themselves out, so that this year's change is next year's continuity. We may wonder, then, both what the place does to people, and what people do to the place"*
>
> (Hannerz, 1996: 28)

Manchester as a city provides an interesting context within which these various cultural and political contestations take place. Both Manchester United and Manchester City supporter cultures place a high level of cultural capital on 'the city', as a place to which they see themselves as belonging and also a place of which they claim some sense of ownership. This is highlighted clearly in the contested discourses over 'authentic' locality discussed earlier in this chapter. It would be inaccurate however to suggest that contested ideas of local Mancunian identity are the sole reserve of Manchester's football supporters. In the late 1980s and early 1990's, similar sensibilities were mobilised as Manchester's music scene was proving enormously popular locally, nationally and globally.

Halfacree and Kitchin (1996), as well as Brown et al. (2000) describe how *'Madchester'*, as the city was colloquially labelled at that time, became a cultural magnet for music fans from all over the UK and beyond, attracted to 'indie' bands such as *The Stone Roses*, *Inspiral Carpets* and *Happy Mondays* who were achieving mainstream success, something that had grown from the 'acid house' scene in which Manchester's *Hacienda* nightclub had become an icon of the dance music scene (Savage 1992; Haslam 1999). As well as more occasional tourist visits from those enamoured with Manchester's music culture, applications for student places at the city's universities rose significantly during this time, a trend largely attributed to Manchester's increasingly popular music culture (Halfacree and Kitchin 1996; Brown et al. 2000: 441).

Being 'from Manchester' gained high levels of cultural capital as a result of this new focus on the city, and patterns of discourse emerged in which claims to Mancunian identity became the subject of unusual scrutiny. What constituted 'Manchester' even became a subject of debate - with the city's boundaries being variously tightened or loosened to include or omit parts of Greater Manchester, Lancashire, Cheshire and even further afield - when claims to Mancunian credentials were made. Music fans would debate, for example, whether a band could be considered as authentically Mancunian if one or more members were from outlying towns such as Altrincham, Oldham, Wigan or Northwich.

These debates would of course continue along similar lines within and around football culture, as Manchester United dominated English football throughout the 1990s and beyond. Some of this discourse went as far as focusing on historical re-drawings of city boundaries – particularly when the locations of football grounds were discussed. City fans would point out

that Old Trafford (the Manchester borough which has hosted and given its name to United's home ground since 1910) has had its own devolved local council since the early 1970s, and is therefore bureaucratically considered outside of Manchester City Council's local jurisdiction. One United fanzine responded to such attempts to discredit their club's Mancunian credentials with a piece of historical research which suggested that according to late 19th Century city boundaries, United, and not City, were actually 'born' in Manchester (United We Stand, 1998a).

A more common response in United fanzines though has been to dismiss such squabbling as decidedly un-Mancunian. This argument positions United as representing a more cosmopolitan Mancunian identity – ala Beck's (1992) concept of the 'rooted cosmopolitan' - which embraces outsiders, in keeping with what was seen as the club's and the city's rich history of embracing immigrant communities (United We Stand, 2000). Manchester City on the other hand are represented in this light as a more parochial, establishment-minded club, and certainly not a 'club of the people' which, according to contemporary English football cultural discourse, their recent underdog status perhaps more readily suggests.

At a civic level, Manchester has not attempted to ignore the cultural context on which its global image largely rests. The city's recognition of sport as a key driver of image was shown clearly in two failed bids to host the Olympic Games (for the 1996 and 2000 events) as well as the staging of the Commonwealth Games in 2002. In promotional literature and imagery for each of these bids, as well as in the conscious image-building strategies the city has engaged in since, Manchester's football and music cultures have featured prominently. This has been part of a championing of local cultural authenticity to go alongside the more outwardly facing, corporate face of urban regeneration that 'the city' sees as key to its ongoing prosperity.

In branding itself as the *'original modern'* city, a tag-line devised by Manchester City Council's 'Creative Director' Peter Saville - the local design artist who became prominent as the designer of record sleeves for bands signed to iconic Manchester label Factory Records, such as *Joy Division* and *New Order* - Manchester's image builders have attempted to balance the past and the future, tradition and progress.

> *"Manchester is a place and a way of living that people choose to identify with. Those people showing those values are the brand. Their values are the essence of the brand. The people are the shareholders in the brand. The quality of their life is the profit from the project"*
>
> (Peter Saville, cited in Marketing Manchester, 2006: 11)

This branding also contains a suggestion that a global, corporate direction can be taken without losing the local, cultural authenticity it is so keen to celebrate: *"the brand vision does not simply mirror the past, it is a beacon – a rallying point for the city as much as a signal to developers about the quality of investment required for the city's competitive future"* (Marketing Manchester, 2006: 11)

Mancunian Football Culture: Supporter Responses

The issues traversed by Peter Saville and colleagues in attempting to balance notions of tradition and progress also exist within the city's football culture, and as this thesis attests, have remained of prime concern to the fans of both United and City. However, while Manchester United's owners have shown little interest in maintaining such a balance, Manchester City's owners have been very keen to present the club's attempted progress as in keeping with the cultural moorings towards which the fans of both clubs direct major significance. The contrast in each club's attitude towards overtly nurturing local identification is highlighted in personal interviews conducted with marketing and public relations representatives in the course of this research, detailed in Chapter 6.

Within this context, as already discussed, United's position of prominence over recent decades has led to a sustained questioning and reflexivity amongst the club's support around notions of local cultural authenticity, whereas such a defensive positioning has been largely uncalled for where Manchester City are concerned. This is a pivotal point to recognise, as it provides a telling background against which to consider the various local responses to the global forces which have transformed Mancunian football culture throughout the time span of this research. City's move from their traditional Maine Road home in 2003, followed by two changes in ownership (in 2007 and 2009), and the bitterly opposed takeover of Manchester United in 2005, reveal different cultural and political values both between and within the two clubs' supporter cultures.

Of course, on-pitch success is a factor not be overlooked in this regard, as long periods without winning silverware can cloud the judgements of success-starved football fans when it comes to welcoming or opposing major transformations such as changes in ownership, as United fans who applauded would-be buyer, and soon-to-be discredited, Michael Knighton on to the Old Trafford pitch in 1989, would uncomfortably testify. Adorno, in a characteristically critical tone, observed that for consumers of mass cultural products

"merely to be carried away by anything at all…compensates for their impoverished and barren existence" (Frith, 1983: 44). In a narrower sense, football fans perhaps more willingly give themselves up to be taken on a journey, any journey, when what they are leaving behind hasn't been providing what they would have hoped for.

In 2009, Notts County Supporters Trust agreed to give up the whole of their hard-fought-for control of the club to a shadowy investment company, rather than continue their unglamorous fan-owned existence with little chance of the on-pitch success they craved: *"Notts County's Supporters Trust had given their monochrome stripy cow of a club away to Munto Finance in exchange for a fistful of magic beans…the future was going to be a rollercoaster ride"* (Needham, 2010: 15). Clearly for many Notts County fans, pride in owning the club themselves was less of an attraction than grasping the promised opportunity for some on-pitch success. The time they had spent in the lower leagues while under supporter ownership was sardonically characterised by one fan as being *"doomed to watch ethical defeat"* (McDougal, 2010: 14).

Within Manchester City's supporter culture, despite an upturn in the club's on-field fortunes following a stadium move and two changes in ownership, there have been some expressions of concern, disappointment and disillusionment at the transformations the club has gone through. The scale of opposition however has been relatively small, in terms of numbers involved, levels of organisation and vociferousness. The move from Maine Road to the City of Manchester Stadium went ahead with virtually no public displays of opposition – rather a resigned, sentimental nostalgia at the seemingly inevitable and necessary loss of the club's famous traditional home.

Penny and Redhead's (2009) study relates the sense of 'placelessness' now felt by City fans, as they struggle to imbue their new home with the topophilic attributes that Maine Road held in such abundance. The transformation in the match-day experience then has been extensively discussed within City's fan culture, as evocatively relayed in Edensor and Millington's (2010) analysis of online discourse between City fans as they mourn the loss of traditional routines, sights and journeys that disappeared with the move from Maine Road.

Such concerns over the perceived shortcomings of the new stadium led some City fans to organise campaigns via groups such as Atmosphere Action Group (AAG) and Bluewatch (see Penny and Redhead, 2009). As detailed in later chapters, these campaigns have focused

on improving the much-criticised atmosphere in the City of Manchester Stadium, rather than overtly criticising or questioning the stewardship or ownership of the club. Groups such as Bluewatch claim that their campaigning has successfully resulted in concessions given by the club to some of their demands, such as that for a 'singing section', a 'scarf day' and, tellingly, for more music by Manchester-based bands to be played at home games (Penny and Redhead, 2009: 760)[6].

As already touched upon, the destruction of Manchester City's much-cherished traditional Maine Road home passed without any significant opposition from City fans at the time (Porter 2008; Edensor and Millington 2010), and despite the cultural friction caused since, as evidenced by the campaigns described above, the move is still mainly viewed within City supporter culture as a positive development – as is the case with the subsequent changes in ownership that were also largely accompanied by supporter enthusiasm rather than resistance or even scepticism (Andrews, 2008). So while Manchester United's more independently-oriented supporters have taken an openly critical, oppositional stance to their club's recent transformations (though many others of course did not), Manchester City's supporter culture has not produced any similarly critical or oppositional tendencies which might threaten to unsettle the traditionally-held deferential sensibilities of 'blind loyalty' that the boycotting Manchester United fans have seemingly moved beyond.

Merrett (2001) documents a number of similarly diverse local reactions to forces of global capitalism, with the support of examples drawn from Canada, Spain and the United States. The focus of Merrett's critique is the commonly-espoused dualistic characterisation of local-global struggles – exemplified by books such as Thomas Friedman's *'Lexus and the Olive Tree'* and Benjamin Barber's *'Jihad versus McWorld'* – which position local oppositions to the 'globalisation of capitalism' as inherently regressive and fundamentalist in nature. Drawing on his examples, Merrett describes how *'identity-based communities'* have formed cooperatives in order to *"progressively articulate with the capitalist world economy, while retaining their local identities and attachment to place"* (Merrett 2001: 69). This has particular relevance when FC United of Manchester, the democratically-constituted co-

[6] Interestingly, this study highlights the importance of local (non-football) popular cultural references within fan discourse. In one online conversation between Manchester City supporters about the transformations in match-day experience following the move, one fan likens his memories of the Maine Road experience to a Happy Mondays gig, while unfavourably equating the City of Manchester Stadium atmosphere to a Cliff Richard concert (Penny and Redhead, 2009: 759). While it is clear that the chief emphasis is being placed on the respective active and passive nature of the crowd one might expect at such events, the fact that the Maine Road atmosphere is linked to a Mancunian band is of no little relevance here, in which notions of local identity, cultural capital and authenticity are of prime concern.

operative football club set up by Manchester United supporters, is considered in greater depth in later chapters.

Beyond 'Local v Global'

In globalisation theory, the interaction between the local and the global has clearly proved to be a complex and contested subject, with old ideas of one-way flows, in which the local was a mere passive recipient of whatever the global brought its way, being replaced by much more multifaceted outlooks whereby the local is seen as very much an agent of globalisation, and therefore not necessarily the victim as was often previously depicted (Robertson 1992; Hannerz 1996).

Representations of *'the local'* can also fall into the trap of imbuing the concept with ambiguous qualities such as tradition and permanence (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Anderson 1991). The romanticising of the local infers a depth, or authenticity, that is by contrast absent in the 'shallow' global - an inference that can easily provide misleading and over-simplified outlooks. The inconsistent and fluid nature of interactions between the local and the global therefore should be kept in mind when analysing areas of cultural life where the two meet, so that as Hannerz' quote at the start of this section infers, the local culture isn't starved of some the ingredients that nourish it.

Likewise, within football culture, an increased exposure to global flows (Castells, 1996) has not had a linear, one-dimensional effect on Manchester United supporters, in that while becoming more acutely aware of their club's global aims, reach and popularity, the peculiarities of the local football culture they inhabit have facilitated a defensive re-assertion of their local Mancunian identifications, but as already described, with any overtly parochial sensibilities shunned, at least within the more independently-organised fan culture. At the same time, they were very conscious of the importance of the global dimensions of their club's dealings, as this largely allowed them to remain competitive with their rivals, both locally and globally (Brown, 2004). So while exhibiting a wider global consciousness, or 'globality' (Robertson, 1992), their local identity was not only left intact, but in some senses (re)invigorated.

The practicalities of Manchester United's globally-orientated operations however, together with wider transformations in the football industry, had increasingly made the very traditional, local forms of supporter culture cherished by many fans incongruous with the

new and changing environment, or structures, they were operating within. So while it could be argued that there was little inherent within local football supporter culture that would reject, or perhaps more aptly be rejected by, exposure to global forces in a generic sense - i.e., a globalisation process shorn of the neo-liberal hegemony described by Giulianotti (2002) - the institutions and formal structures which are relied upon by the local cultures, such as the football club 'company' and those organisations that govern the game, have not shown an ability or willingness to combine adaptation *and* preservation within this wider environment.

Attempts by governing bodies and football club owners, particularly in the English Premier League, to adapt to the changing environment in which they operate have tended therefore to favour an approach that moulds the operations of the football club to best profit from the markets of which they are now part. Of course, this shouldn't be viewed as simply an attempt to make the best of the situation in which they were to find themselves, as the perceived benefits of market forces had been explicitly behind many of the keenly-sought developments in English football over recent decades, as previously discussed (Conn, 1997). The structure of English football therefore has been actively shaped by its guardians to take financial advantage of the global marketplace (Crabbe and Brown, 2004), rather than having any inherent 'market value' above more stringently regulated competitors in other countries.

Fan Democracy, Supporter Power

Coming from a position of relatively little political/economic agency, and with an altogether more altruistic motive, many football supporters have actively sought to oppose the commodification and corporatisation of their football clubs and the game generally. The particular example of Manchester United supporters has shown that while the lure of local, national and global success has remained strong, more fundamental concerns with maintaining a distinctive, local supporter culture have required fans to increasingly oppose the direction in which their club is being taken. The fans' lack of power over such concerns has led some to dig deeper still, to question the nature of their cultural identities, affiliations and relationships.

For these fans, strongly-held ideologies regarding community ownership of such an important local institution has led them to turn on its head the traditionally-held assumption that supporters should take a submissive role in their relationship with their football cubs. Supporter concerns, for so long ignored or patronised, have now become more politically-

motivated, with a growing resentment towards those charged with overseeing the healthy development of the sport and their particular club.

If the game's guardians are either unwilling or unable to provide the stewardship and moral direction the fans crave, then supporters are recognising that they will have to become more than mere consumers if they wish to alter the course currently being taken. Fan democracy is certainly a growing issue in English football, and in recent years supporters trusts have taken full or part ownership of a number of lower league or non-league clubs. The example of FC United however represents something new, in that a significant number of supporters from one of the most 'global' of all football clubs felt so strongly that their club had become dislocated - 'spiritually' at least - from its traditional, local roots that they did the previously unthinkable, and not only boycotted attendance at matches, but formed their own club as an alternative.

These fans then were able to 'step out' from traditionally defined roles and alter their perspectives on just what constitutes *'the football club'* in order to maintain an immaterial allegiance to their club, and in fact to re-ground their support through the formation of a material 'replacement' for the now inaccessible (either financially or ethically) Manchester United.

This 'altered state' of identification - which is described in later chapters under the light of Marx and Engels' challenge to cultures of resistance to cleanse themselves of 'the muck of ages' (Barker, 1995), which he argues consists of those sensibilities and affiliations which work to hold back potentially emancipatory transformations - has clear implications therefore not just from a 'local identity' perspective of cultural distinction, but also from a wider viewpoint of political engagement, in that these fans - through their experience of market forces impacting negatively upon their cultural lives - have been able to take a more critical view of politically-charged issues of power, ownership, consumption and regulation.

The reasons why some supporters were able or willing to go through such a transformation, while many others were not, thereby potentially identifying cultural factors that are open to, or maybe mitigate against, wider political engagement, remains of prime concern throughout the thesis. That the events took place during a time of various social, economic and political change, both within English football and without, opens up not only possibilities for cultural shifts, but also presents many difficulties in identifying what represents a continuation and

what is genuinely a break from tradition.

Something Old, Something New: Tradition v Progress?

An important aspect to bear in mind during these analyses is that as various transformations take hold, whether being imposed from above or emerging from below, there tends to be a coming together of traditional cultural sensibilities along with new ways of thinking about the cultural world. The relationship between the two is often uneasy, so that for supporters experiencing these changes the feelings of ambivalence recognised by Bauman and others as characteristic of much of contemporary social life, present new challenges over how, if possible, to negotiate and preferably separate the more-desirable and less-than-desirable elements of each. Part of this involves a recognition by most football supporters that a case for preserving some of the traditional mainstays of football culture can not easily be made, and ultimately for many there is an acknowledgement that some things are better left behind.

Also, as emphasised by King (1998), there is a danger of essentialising football culture if we allow an implication to go unchecked that there was an unchanging English football 'tradition' that only came to be challenged in the contemporary era of prevailing commercial influences. Organised football, at specific times throughout its history, would necessarily have been contingent on the 'wider social formation' of the time, so it should be pointed out that the term 'traditional', much like 'authentic', is best considered with this qualification in mind.

Despite what evidence suggests is an overall lack of politicised culture within English football (Hargreaves, 1992) some fans have, as discussed at length throughout this thesis, attempted to mobilise against many of the commercially-oriented transformations in recent years. Issues such as affordability, fan democracy and ultimately of ownership that have been prominent throughout many of these campaigns, readily raise issues of power distribution along social class lines. This of course is an aspect of identity that many of the fans and supporter groups are comfortable with traversing, existing as it already does, often in a benign sense, within established traditional supporter identification and discourse (Crabbe and Brown, 2004).

However, these discourses of resistance inevitably risk hiding some of the more overtly masculine, aggressive and exclusionary sensibilities with which football supporter culture has in the past been, and to an extent still is, characterised (King, 1997a; Nash, 2000). So

while much of the rhetoric used to mobilise fans has focused on the perhaps more readily grasped concerns of ticket prices and thus of increased access by local, working class and younger supporters, issues of gender, sexuality, race and ethnicity - shifting in this case on a different trajectory to social class - can not be ignored by football supporters seeking to develop a more inclusive fan culture.

Kath Woodward's (2007) investigation into changing attitudes in English football amidst recent government-led pressure to provide a more inclusive approach, provides a telling critique of some of the barriers to, as well as the possibilities for, what she terms 'new identity positions' with regard to cultural diversity and social inclusion. Importantly, there is a recognition of the potential for people in and around the football industry, including supporters, to not just respond out of necessity to new rules and regulations, but to potentially become *"self-regulating citizen selves"* (Woodward, 2007: 758). The way in which diversity discourses are framed, according to Woodward, are crucial in determining the extent to which changes in attitude may bring genuine equality for previously excluded groups.

Diversity as Civilising Influence?

Sitting within the sociology of sport's previously heavy reliance on Norbert Elias' thesis of the Civilising Process, football crowd diversity has often been packaged in a functional and utilitarian way by pointing to a need to create a family-orientated and therefore more friendly environment, particularly in light of the game's poor image in the 1970s and 1980s and the recommendations of the Taylor Report following the 1989 Hillsborough disaster (see Taylor, 1991). This of course rests on an assumption that football crowds would be better behaved if there were a more diverse mix of people in the crowd.

Such beliefs tend usually to focus on a supposed civilising influence that women have on men (Crolley and Long, 2001), although female fans of course have been quick to point out that even if that were true, their role in a football crowd can not be reduced to this functional role of controlling and 'improving' the men, as many female fans engage extremely deeply with 'traditional' football supporter culture (Coddington, 1997).

Calls for increased diversity have not just targeted women of course, but has also focused on ethnic minorities, homosexuals and the disabled. This well meaning attention on excluded groups is often not wholly welcomed by those individuals already 'included' in football

supporter culture, as Hughson and Poulton (2008) recognised in their study of the English FA's attempts to attract a more diverse crowd to the national team's matches, which led to the kind of newspaper headline that can easily fan the flames of 'traditional' supporter antipathy towards 'new fans': *"England Seeks the Perfect Fan: Female, Asian and Friendly"* (Hughson and Poulton, 2008: 512). Not only might such instances lead to more difficulties for attempts at inclusion, but may also actually increase exclusionary discourse for those 'tarred' as new, friendly and therefore 'untraditional'.

Social Inclusion and Community

The social inclusion agenda of the New Labour government following its election victory in 1997 (Mellor, 2008) is a key context here, as it represented a shift in perspective, away from a detached, often elitist view of football fandom as a mostly troublesome and dangerous domain, that seemed to dominate governmental rhetoric and policy particularly throughout and following the 'hooligan' moral panics of the 1970s and 1980s (Dunning et al., 1988; Williams and Wagg, 1991; Taylor, 1992; Redhead, 1997; King, 1998; Giulianotti, 1999).

Within a new national agenda in which sport was to be utilised as a vehicle for social inclusion, the Football Foundation commissioned a report that specifically examined the issue of community engagement for football clubs in England (Brown et al. 2006). As well as recognising that the term 'community' can often be used inconsistently, and certainly without thorough clarification of its meaning in particular contexts (see Chapter 3), the report also identified that while football clubs and the game in general have done much good work in recent years within this broadly defined framework of 'community' and social inclusion, there continues to be a lack of 'joined up' thinking and action, that might lead to football clubs having more genuine, ongoing positive impacts on their various communities.

The commercial imperative within English football in recent years is highlighted as a factor that can easily sideline, overlook or plain contradict any stated community concerns, and the prevailing tendency to view supporters as customers rather than community stakeholders again reflects the market-centred approach of many clubs (Brown et al., 2006; see also Mellor, 2008).

For supporters, in their resistance to being positioned as consumers, it is perhaps understandable that a culture of nostalgia for 'the good old days' of traditional fandom would take hold. With that of course has tended to come a cultural antipathy to the 'new fans' that fit

more readily into the customer mould set by profit-hungry clubs (Giulianotti, 2002). This feeling is expressed throughout the independent supporter movement in fanzines as well as via campaign organisations (King, 1997a, 1998; Nash, 2000; Crabbe and Brown, 2004).

The game's new, re-imaged and re-packaged product, which as well as attracting more affluent customers has also attracted a more diverse audience along non-economic lines - rightly celebrated by those invested in the social inclusion agenda – potentially brings those football fans who position themselves as gatekeepers of traditional supporter culture into potential conflict with a trend of new diversity that happens to accompany the focus of their concerns, which is the exclusion of the traditional young, local, male (King, 1997a), and especially the working class supporter. Indeed, Crabbe and Brown (2004: 32) report that the English Football Association's 1991 'Blueprint for the Future of Football' put forward a plan for a Premier League (which was implemented the following year) called for a raising of the average social class demographic amongst football fans, due to the increased spending power that could then be offered to sponsors and advertisers.

Diversity and Authenticity

Notwithstanding the varying levels of diversity which have always been present in the football crowd (Lewis, 2009; Woodhouse and Williams, 1999), it is clear that for women, the disabled, homosexuals and ethnic minorities, while recently finding new opportunities to buy a place alongside what are regarded as the traditional archetypal supporters in mainstream fandom, there has been an uncomfortable process to negotiate whereby while independent fan culture is on the whole (though certainly not completely) welcoming of a more culturally diverse fanbase (King, 2000), those fans that most noticeably jar against deeply-held notions of the authentic, traditional supporter (see Robson, 2000: 87 and also Crabbe and Brown, 2004: 35) tend to be stigmatised as representing the inauthentic new consumer fan more readily than those without quite so visible or audible distinctions.

It was possible to observe such conflicts as match tickets started to become increasingly scarce for Manchester United's travelling support as their club's, and the game's, popularity grew through the 1990s and beyond, and this tended to manifest itself in a peculiar way for matches played in London. Fanzines claimed that sponsors were receiving especially large allocations of tickets for such games (United We Stand, 2002a), recognising no doubt the attraction tickets would have for clients who live or work in London.

Following certain United away games in the capital, such as at QPR's Loftus Road (the temporary home of Fulham on occasions when this issue was raised), Stamford Bridge (Chelsea), White Hart Lane (Tottenham Hotspur) and Highbury (then home of Arsenal), United fans started to complain, often - tellingly - with self-consciously tentative use of national/ethnic language/labels, about large groups of Far East Asian, usually reported as Japanese, tourists in the United away end (United We Stand, 2002b & 2003). The implication was that the sponsors' tickets must have found their way into the hands of tourists, rather than the more deserving hands of the club's usual travelling supporters, many of whom would travel without a ticket in hope of gaining entry through other means.

This was an example of a newer, more culturally-diverse audience not only being attracted by the game's (and Manchester United's) new more inclusive, celebrity-inspired and media-driven image, but being enabled via the same commercial rationale to gain access to tickets that would in the past have been more easily accessible to the club's traditional travelling support. The anger these incidences aroused amongst United's away support was clearly directed towards the football club's ticketing policies and wider commercial direction, but by singling out particularly conspicuous individuals or groups as evidence of the perceived injustice, they of course entered uncomfortable terrain that would leave their responses open to criticism. Indeed, one fanzine writer urged supporters to be more careful with their choice of terminology and sentiment when airing such concerns (United We Stand, 2001).

More recently, the regular appearance during televised matches of a number of Sikh Manchester United supporters sat close to the United bench during home games at Old Trafford has caused comment from both United and City fans, as their outward appearance (as non-traditional, according to English football supporting culture) led to them being cast as an example of inauthentic fandom. In the case of Manchester City supporters posting on an internet message board, the Sikh fans were cited as further evidence of United's non-local and by implication, fickle support, despite the fact that the fans concerned are long-time match-goers and live in Whalley Range, an area bordering Old Trafford that, as with much of Manchester, is the long-standing home of an ethnically diverse population.

That the Sikh fans' local 'credentials' would not be widely known outside of this locale is not the issue here, more so that there is a presumption that a visible display of non-white ethnicity can represent for some the inauthentic non-local Manchester United caricature. This differs slightly from the 'Japanese tourists' complaints by United fans, in that people of

Sikh and other south Asian ethnicities have been an established and prominent part of Manchester's communities for many decades.

As recognised however by Bradbury (2001), Brown et al. (2006) and Woodward (2007), this hasn't yet resulted in anything like representative numbers of ethnic minorities attending games, which is particularly telling given the large ethnic minority populations that have lived for many generations in very close proximity to both Old Trafford and Maine Road. At worst then the reactions of fans may reveal racist attitudes informing what is felt to constitute an authentic supporter, and at best clumsy and poorly articulated attempts to highlight the loss of traditional characteristics within football supporter culture.

The culture of football fandom in England then has arguably not adequately prepared its adherents for some of the relatively complex issues it is faced with as it comes to terms with, or perhaps attempts to mount a defence against, the 'hypercommodification' of English football (Giulianotti, 2002: 27). I would argue that overtly sexist, homophobic and particularly racist sentiment is widely deemed unacceptable within the majority of mainstream and independent football supporter culture, a view shared by Woodward (2007: 775), though this of course does not mean that exclusionary discourse and practices have been eradicated.

The difficulty fans have in unpacking what they regard as class-based exclusion from what they may otherwise largely welcome as cultural diversity (King, 2000), has been exploited by defenders of the commercial, free market approach in contemporary football, who relish painting supporter discontent, campaigns and protests as xenophobic and insular, as was attempted by a spokesman for Malcolm Glazer at the height of the 'Not For Sale' campaign (Taylor, 2004), and indeed is a trend recognised generally by Merrett (2001) within local-global conflicts.

For FC United, with its clear commitment to becoming a community-oriented and inclusive football club, which includes providing access to 'affordable football' for what are usually regarded as otherwise 'disenfranchised', economically excluded Manchester United fans in Greater Manchester, an awareness of such complexities is vital. This is an acute issue for FC United, as a large part of their attraction is that they represent, and aim to provide, what is now regarded as an old-fashioned match-day experience, most of which is based on the continuation of the Manchester United match-day tradition and atmosphere in the form of

songs and other cultural values carried by boycotting, traditionally-rooted, Manchester United supporters.

That much of the independent supporter movement from which FC United emerged can be characterised as sharing a relatively enlightened 'rooted cosmopolitanism' outlook (Beck, 2002), suggests that such hurdles can be negotiated successfully, but as the hegemonic dominance of these values is likely to receive ongoing challenge from potentially conflicting values that exist both within the football culture and elsewhere, this can in no way be guaranteed.

British Football and 'the left'

The challenges that may come from traditional football culture are complex, and the context from which the dominant ideology of English football culture emerged is addressed in John Hargreaves' (1992) historical insights into the relationship between British sport and socialism. The key argument put forward by Hargreaves is that in contrast to much of mainland Europe, British socialism never took hold within sporting culture due to the particular *"economic, political and cultural constraints that are characteristic of Britain's development"*, and also because the character of British Socialism *"disabled socialists from adequately grasping the significance of sport in popular culture, from responding effectively to the way class, sex and gender, and national identities are formed in sporting activity, and from influencing processes of conflict and accommodation taking place around sport between dominant and subordinate groups"* (Hargreaves, 1992: 131).

A particularly interesting claim made by Hargreaves is that where politicised left-wing groups took an active interest in sport in the 1970s and 1980s, it tended to be with recreational, less competitive activities rather than with the more competitive, commercially organised sports. With the latter already well established within working class culture, the link between the former and left wing 'identity' politics in particular, which led to a great deal of controversy over a perceived 'politically correct' lack of competition in schools, arguably helped to edge a key aspect of working class sympathy towards the more competition-friendly, commercially-oriented Conservative Party (Hargreaves, 1992: 137).

The implication then for the relationship between the 'traditional' values of football culture, linked to more 'masculine' conceptions of competition, and what are regarded as more 'feminine' values of altruism and cooperation (Hargreaves, 1992: 137), is that both sets of

values occupy deeply ingrained ideological positions within working class sporting culture and left wing political interests respectively. This clearly then demonstrates a failure in both camps, though noticeably not by political opponents quite happy to exploit this gulf in mutual understanding, to successfully negotiate a marriage between existing working class cultural values and socialist interpretations of the role sport plays in forging identity and shaping cultural and social understanding. For the more intellectually motivated socialist movements, we can speculate as to the influence of critical Frankfurt School-type conceptions of commercial popular culture on their approach to working class sports, which may give us further impetus to attempts to find a more subtle way to approach the issue of popular culture's ambivalent role in working class lives.

The masculinity that permeates British sporting culture, especially football (King, 1997a), means that individuals or characteristics not living up to perceived masculine ideals, such as women or gay men, or even not-sufficiently masculine men, have tended to be excluded in some ways. Occasionally certain values are questioned, such as every time England are outclassed in a major international competition by a technically superior footballing nation, that in placing less emphasis on masculine characteristics of physical size and strength, rouse usually culturally conservative pundits to ponder the overly-aggressive 'grass roots' culture in English football, at least for a few days.

Certainly, traditional notions of masculinity permeate commonly-held ideas of an 'ideal type' footballing environment, as the Daily Telegraph's David Thomas reveals while looking back nostalgically to days long before the corporate, 'sanitised', 'middle-class' spectacle of the 1994 World Cup held in the USA he critiques, not any more watched by *"...a pulsating, shouting, singing crowd, who watched hard men play a hard man's sport"* (cited in Crabbe and Brown, 2004: 28).

Football, Masculinity and Independent Supporter Formations

As recognised in any analysis of English football culture, masculinity has held a hegemonic influence over the actions, values and motivations of the adherents to that cultural world. That the codification of football in the late 19th Century, as with most other sports in England, was a design by men for men, from within an exclusively male, white, upper class habitus, and that its subsequent 'democratisation' through the early 20th Century occurred predominantly in the context of the male working populations of industrial towns and cities, suggests that there should be little surprise that masculinity is deeply ingrained in English

football culture (see Dunning, 1994; also Lewis, 2009).

The ownership of clubs throughout this time also tended to be dominated by male owners of successful local businesses (Conn, 1997), and likewise the media which disseminated news and information about the clubs' fortunes existed for much of the 20th Century in a highly patriarchal environment. Maleness and masculinity then has permeated the playing, ownership, governance, regulation, supporting, consumption, analysis and understanding of English football for the whole of its history.

It is how this masculinity impacts upon attempts to make the game more inclusive that is important here, not just along lines of gender or sexuality, but also for the disabled, for ethnic minorities and most pertinently for this thesis, in the context of class-based exclusions. Anthony King (1997a) presented an analysis of a particular group of Manchester United supporters that he labelled 'the lads' – a network of Manchester United supporters grouped loosely around the independent fanzines – that he claimed utilise a discourse primarily embedded in masculine values in what he recognised was their simultaneously compliant and resistant relationship with the club. According to the 'lads', the club was pursuing a direction that was increasingly excluding (economically and practically) what and who they saw as the authentic 'bedrock' of the club's traditional support (King, 1997a).

While King correctly acknowledges the prominent masculine overtones and undertones of this group's cultural discourse, there is a tendency in King's findings to overplay this gendered aspect of the fans' values and motivations. My experience of immersion within the cultural habitus of independent Manchester United supporter culture (at the same time and beyond) convinces me that while traditional exclusionary 'norms' certainly do linger within the development and maintenance of different forms of cultural capital, and King is therefore correct to acknowledge this, there is a more 'progressive', inclusive and in some senses cosmopolitan thread which informs these fans' articulations as they respond to the transformations experienced in their cultural world.

The problem therefore with King's strong focus on masculinity in his analysis is that it risks positioning the supporters' protests and concerns as unreflexive, exclusionary and misguided, thereby potentially invalidating their genuine attempts to prevent what they see (I would say correctly) as culturally damaging commercially-driven developments within their club and the sport nationally. There are certainly contradictions in the cultural and political values that

King accurately identifies as held by the 'lads', also acknowledged elsewhere by Brown (1998), such as in the consumption and display of designer labels and in the 'love the team, hate the club' compromise, a position which I argue in this thesis became increasingly untenable in light of the Glazer takeover in 2005.

King is also correct to highlight some fans' reliance on overly simplistic understandings of tradition in English football, particularly in respect of the local, working class 'heritage' they may see themselves as upholding. That said, as Nash (2000: 468) points out, just because academics seek to pick often justifiable holes in claims to historically-based identities or traditions, doesn't mean they become any less real or tangible for those that live those identities and cultures. So while academics can be as careful as they like with using terms like 'authentic' or 'traditional', it would be misleadingly timid to avoid full recognition and interpretation of how they are used, understood or even imagined within the cultural habitus in question.

I would also cautiously question Nash's claim that it would be 'nonsensical' to expect (any) fans to reflect too deeply on such central aspects of their 'lived experience' (Nash, 2000: 468) as this can and has occurred within supporter culture and discourse to some degree. As a general claim however, I would support the point Nash makes that fans, or the majority of people for that matter, don't tend to reflect sociologically or historically on most aspects of their everyday identifications.

A central claim of this thesis though is that through the Manchester United fans' own independently produced institutions such as the fanzines and later through IMUSA and SU/MUST, and eventually FC United, a deep level of introspection was able to develop and gain wider purchase. This observation is in line with Giddens' (1994) recognition of how globalisation can foster a heightened awareness of some of the formerly subconscious, or at least in this case unquestioned, aspects of identity formation.

Addressing King's inference that 'the lads' excessive reliance on masculine values is representative of Manchester United's independent supporter as a whole, as interpreted by Nash, it is worth emphasising the heterogeneity amongst these various fields. The two main Manchester United fanzines, *Red Issue* and *United We Stand*, both act as conduits for hammering out sometimes complicated cultural issues, and as was the case at the time of King's research, can often include polemics against deeply ingrained understandings or

myths, but can also include views which serve to maintain the status quo on a whole range of issues.

Groups such as *IMUSA* and *Shareholders United* however are significantly different, in that although there are certainly large overlaps in personnel with the fanzines, and certain issues are covered by both organisations *and* the fanzines, there is a more distinct focus on campaigning and lobbying within IMUSA and SU, and these campaigns are focused on ensuring the fans' interests are defended in an organised and effective way, meaning that certain 'lines of argument', policy or tactics are agreed upon by committee consensus. The medium of the fanzines on the other hand, while generally displaying loosely left-wing editorial values (Haynes, 1995), nevertheless allows for vastly divergent views to be expressed page-by-page and reader's letter-by-reader's letter.

While IMUSA and SU can not be immune to the less 'progressive' elements of football supporter culture around notions of gender, sexuality, disability, race and ethnicity, I would argue that where these issues have been sidelined or overlooked, it has been as a result of more fundamental and cross-cutting concerns around exclusion in one form or another on economic grounds for United supporters as a whole, with an implicit understanding that for meaningful opportunities to be created for previously excluded groups to participate in and contribute to football culture and governance, there can not be a concomitant removal of opportunities for the least affluent current or potential Manchester United fans.

Where I find agreement with King on this issue however, is that any overt appeals to gender diversity in particular would likely be met with opposition or ambivalence amongst certain constituents within the independent supporter culture, although I would not extend this to the dominant paradigm which informs the direction and focus of IMUSA or SU (via elected committees), or indeed the fanzines (via editors and regular writers).

King's interpretation of the place inhabited by masculinity in his research subjects led for instance to Rex Nash unfairly characterising IMUSA as a naively traditionalist, value-inconsistent and ultimately unenlightened organisation in comparison to other independent supporter organisations around the country (Nash, 2000). This though appears to have been partly due to this unhelpful conflation of IMUSA, SU, the fanzines and the individual fan participants in King's research into 'the lads', and as therefore sharing a homogenous set of values. Neither author adequately accounts for this overly simplistic conflation, which is

particularly surprising considering both articles warn against the risks of making essentialist claims of what are the diverse and contingent values of football supporter culture. As King's field research took place during and immediately following the 1993-94 football season, and IMUSA was only set up in 1995, Nash's projection of the views of the 'lads' onto IMUSA therefore should surely be restricted to a recognition that the habitus from which IMUSA would emerge contained the views reported and interpreted by King's 1997 article.

By using problematic secondary evidence in a comparison with the differently surveyed independent supporters associations (ISAs) of other clubs at the centre of his study, Nash presents an unduly critical characterisation of IMUSA, though the article does nevertheless offer some crucial insights into the challenges faced by the coming together of some broadly defined and overlapping interest groups in English football: what we might term *commercial*, *traditional* and *social inclusion* interests. Importantly, Nash recognises that the work of ISAs is usually more genuinely progressive in terms of its approach to social inclusion than that of football clubs, largely due to the groups' politically-informed antipathy towards commercial interests (Nash, 2000).

He also highlights the prominence of social class in his ISAs' rationale on various campaigns, though again the misplaced faith in King's (1997) interpretations of Manchester United's 'lads' and subsequent conflation with IMUSA, leads Nash to claim that IMUSA place the traditionalist primacy of masculine values above class interests, thus demonstrating an unreconstructed, narrow and simplistic approach whereas the outlooks of the ISA's at the centre of his study are held up by contrast as *"wider, more sophisticated, nuanced and therefore worthy of consideration"* (Nash, 2000: 483).

In order to gauge the potential of football supporters as politically-engaged, culturally sensitive agents that are able to negotiate the complex interactions of global capitalism, traditional identifications, cultural values, political ideology as well as newer, more inclusive sensibilities, it is important to consider the complex, contingent and contradictory pathways that supporters tread.

The different discourses that underpin or guide supporters must also be understood, as these are telling both in terms of the cultural baggage of traditional hegemonies within football fandom and in wider contemporary society, and also of the dominant institutions of power that largely set the terrain. Woodward recognises this when she points to the competing and

overlapping discourses of *charity*, *utilitarianism* and *human rights* in which identities might be challenged or transformed (Woodward, 2007). Such considerations are revisited in Chapter 6 when the radical, inclusive vision of FC United of Manchester is analysed.

The theoretical concepts discussed here are explored in more depth in the following chapter, which reviews key debates in sociology, cultural studies and social movement literature.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FOCUS

The theoretical underpinnings of the core arguments and debates that make up the thesis are introduced and critiqued in this chapter. The role culture is thought to play in society is therefore of paramount concern, and so key sociological and cultural studies perspectives are discussed, along with a critical review of relevant literature on social movements. Specifically, how various forms of social and cultural engagement might facilitate a more politicised perspective is of prime concern..

Culture's Ambivalent Role

At the heart of this thesis is the question of what role certain kinds of cultural identification and engagement play in encouraging individuals to either comply with or resist structural transformations they experience within what Bourdieu (1984) termed the *habitus* and *fields* of their cultural interactions. Tellingly, this question harks to long-contested sociological debates over where and how 'culture' sits in relation to the individual and society. Talcott Parsons, for instance, positioned culture as existing between the individual personality and the social world in which they must exist. From this perspective, culture plays a functional role in keeping these potentially conflicting realms of human existence working alongside each other (Bauman, 1999).

Bauman characterises Parson's view of culture as an attempt to answer what he terms the Hobbesian quandary of the social sciences, of why supposedly free-willed individuals tend to follow largely patterned and uniform existences (Bauman, 1999: xvii). Parsons contribution to this debate was to hold up culture as the great co-ordinator of human-social existence, providing a kind of negotiation service through which differences can be worked out, so that there can at least be some level of mutual satisfaction in the two factions' co-existence. Both parties may consider their own interests to be extremely important, but vitally both are only seen to be functioning healthily if they allow ample ground for the other to flourish.

The relationship between individuals and society certainly changes over time and place, so we have to ask what exactly culture does that might account for the differences in how

individuals see their role in society, and vice versa. An obvious example of where this might change dramatically would include during or following revolution. If culture does play a regulatory role, we must therefore ask whether it can be sufficiently nudged by certain events, actions, groups or individuals, so that it digresses from the ostensibly neutral or conservative role suggested by Parsons, to convince enough individuals to seek a change in what they and others get out of their relationship with society.

Basically therefore, the question revolves around the extent to which culture has the capacity to transform society, and the individuals living within it, by altering how people read and interpret the values, symbols and meanings it carries. Or is culture, cast as it has been in such a facilitating role, while occasionally providing glimpses of a different reality, destined always to bring dissenters back into line and manoeuvre society back into the old routine? Is culture therefore primarily functional, and perhaps more pertinently, in what or whose interests does it tend to function?

Rather than trying to establish a definitive, universal answer to such a question, it is helpful to acknowledge the inherent ambivalence within culture, which according to Bauman (1999: xiv) tends towards both 'creativity' and 'normative regulation', both of which sit together uncomfortably within what is always a 'composite' culture. That culture can contain both *continuation* and *departure* is then for Bauman, following Georg Simmel, a paradox which we must recognise and use as knowledge to work with, rather than try to solve once and for all. Simmel therefore invites us to face up to the 'tragedy' of culture in which the possibilities of escape always rest in the keys which of course, turn both ways;

> *"The emancipatory drive gave birth to constraint, restlessness rebounds in fixity: the unruly and intractable spirit creates its own shackles"*
>
> (Bauman, 1999: xix).

Within this tragedy of course, with it being founded on an inherent paradox, there must always remain hope that culture contains within it a possibility for meaningful resistance, even if that is due to its ambivalence rather than anything more overtly oppositional. Bauman enthusiastically cites the work of Claude Levi-Strauss in support of his argument that there is no totalising nature of culture. While containing certain strong structuring elements therefore, culture in fact can lend itself as much to change as it might to conservation, but never in a linear, predictable or transferable pattern. Bauman posits Levi-Strauss' removal of an ingrained opposition between continuity and discontinuity as opening

up the sociological possibility, indeed reality, of ambiguity, as opposed to positivist searches for unbreakable structures, so that for example Michel Foucault's notion of the *'discursive formation'* and Jacques Derrida's *'iteration'* could not have found a sociological footing without the groundwork provided by Levi-Strauss (Bauman, 1999: xxvii).

Foucault's suggestion that identity can be maintained while contradictory sensibilities are *discursively* cultivated, and Derrida's observation that even with repetition there is a certain *iterated* originality, certainly go some way in helping to understand some of the contradictory cultural values expressed, and reactions observed, in the course of this research. This particular cultural environment therefore, not only contains elements of compliance and resistance, but supporting the perspectives of Levi-Strauss, Simmel and Bauman on the ambivalence of culture, occasionally they appear inseparable.

Cultural Studies Perspectives

Cultural Studies is a sub-discipline of Sociology that - in keeping with a prevailing view of culture as all-encompassing within human social life - has been comfortable in traversing various other disciplines in the social sciences, such as politics, linguistics, philosophy, history, cultural anthropology and human geography. Much of the substance within the various debates that have fed Cultural Studies has centred on a belief that ordinary, everyday culture, of everybody - the masses, not just the rich and privileged - contains rich seams of value and meaning, the study of which can reveal telling insights into the interaction of individuals and society.

In cultural studies, commonly cited foes such as FR Leavis, Matthew Arnold and David Holbrook are generally now seen as having espoused 'elitist' views that posit 'popular' or 'mass' culture as simplistic, empty, shallow or immoral, as opposed to the deeply value-laden 'high' culture or nostalgically recalled 'folk' culture. Railing against previously established elitism, Cultural Studies attempted to shine an intellectual and political light on *everyday* cultural interactions, largely in an attempt to better understand how and where power resides in society. In Britain, the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (BCCCS) was particularly influential in this regard, with scholars such as Richard Hoggart and Stuart Hall questioning many assumptions about the culture inhabited and consumed by the working classes (Gibson, 2000).

Critics of working class popular culture have had quite varied reasons for taking a negative

view of pursuits such as football, popular music and 'low brow' literary forms such as the novel. Aside from those proponents of 'high seriousness' mentioned above, who were relatively easily characterised as elitist by 'defenders' of working class culture, there has also been the critical Marxist tradition to respond to, that for obvious reasons can't be so easily cast as an enemy of the working class, despite delivering equally withering assessments of how the working classes spend their time. Indeed, a primary aim of the BCCCS was to empower the working class to gain *"the self-confidence and energy to assert its own values"* (Garnham, 1995: 63).

Sharing a disdain with the 'high culture' critics for the repetitive and commercial nature of mass cultural transactions, critical Marxist scholars, such as the influential Frankfurt School of Adorno, Marcuse and Horkheimer, sought to highlight the manipulative nature of commodified mass cultural products, rather than merely express high-minded concern with the aesthetic or intellectual paucity of the culture of the masses. Marxist critics therefore had ideological and political reasons to oppose much of popular and mass culture, reflecting a wider critical view of society, and ultimately their view of unequal power relations between the proletariat and the owners of production, the latter inducing 'mass deception' over the former via its control of the 'culture industry' (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1972).

British cultural studies has largely been grounded in a related paradigm that inscribes popular culture with political significance, though it has tended also to celebrate the distinctiveness and depth of the culture rather than write it off as nothing but a means of social control. EP Thompson, in highlighting the important role played by working class culture in the development of capitalism, was influential in fostering a wider recognition of popular culture as a site of potential social contestation between powerful and subordinate groups. This is cited as a starting point for the Birmingham School's studies of subcultures, notably through the work of Stan Cohen and Dick Hebdige (Hall and Jefferson, 2006), that linked marginal youth cultures and the 'moral panics' which often accompanied their emergence and popularity, with the economic, social and political circumstances (Strinati, 2004).

A key aspect of the work of the BCCCS involved the 'reading' of culture as a 'text', in much the same way as a book can be read, with certain meanings often less obvious than others. Building on the linguistic tradition of *semiotics*, and particularly the work of Ferdinand de Saussure and Roland Barthes, these studies into subcultures were able to observe and

analyse the various activities, dress codes, discourse and value systems in order to delve into and decode the structures of meaning within subcultures. The significance of these 'maps of meaning', as read by the Cultural Studies scholars, would generally be traced back to systemic factors within the capitalist parent culture around issues of exclusion, alienation and disaffection.

Consumption, Creativity and 'Postmodern' Culture

There has been criticism that such culturally grounded studies have read too much into the various signs and symbols of subcultures, particularly where overtly political resistance is implied in the readings (Morley, 1993). John Fiske's (1986) 'semiotic democracy' approach and other advocates of textual *polysemy* such as Ien Ang (1985) on 'Watching Dallas' and Henry Jenkins' (1992) 'Textual Poachers' have received criticism along these lines. This 'cultural populism' view posits the cultural consumer as an active agent, constantly interpreting according to unique meanings and values, often rendering economic structures as malleable to the desires and whims of the people. Fiske's work in particular has been characterised as helping to lead cultural studies away from more critical 'politicised' perspectives, with many critics bemoaning what they see as capitalism being let off the hook by championing the discerning consumer in such celebratory studies (McGuigan 1992; Gibson 2000; Schor 2007).

While cultural studies critics tend to sympathise to some extent with the populist position, in that they agree that everyday, popular cultural participation is full of meaning and therefore worthy of intellectual scrutiny, the concern is that meaningful political resistance is being inferred where often it does not exist. Without the accompaniment of more practical resistance, any oppositional or creative interpretations or uses by consumers of 'dominant' cultural texts can only be regarded, according to critics of the populist approach, as *"an inert force"* or at best a display of *"passive dissent"* (Clarke, 1990: 42).

David Morley's influential studies into television audiences attempt to bridge the gap between populist and systemic reductionist critiques, and urge cultural studies researchers to see the 'audience' as both creative yet contingent, as not completely at the mercy of the text's encoded message and yet not fully autonomous (Morley, 1986). Keeping such a dialectic balance means we must *"pay simultaneous attention to both the ability of audiences to generate creative and divergent meanings, and the wider national and global determinants that constrain and limit some meanings while enabling and encouraging*

others" (Gibson, 2000: 258).

Critiques of this nature can be considered - if somewhat obliquely - alongside those that target Jean Baudrillard's views on what he sees as the depthless and untenured nature of many elements of popular culture. Although Baudrillard refuses to impart the power to consumers insisted upon by Fiske et al., and thus has a wholly less optimistic view of *postmodern* popular culture, the adoption of such a perspective on its own risks going too far in the opposite direction from the cultural populists, and in so doing overlooking completely the critical, resistive elements that *may* be able to recognise and resist the restructuring or destructuring powers, that afflict what to them may still be experienced as 'their' own authentic, grounded culture.

Music has tended to be more fertile ground than football in attempts to read political meanings into popular cultural consumption. Sharing in some ways Fiske's more celebratory approach to popular cultural consumption, Simon Frith regarded a big weakness in more critical approaches as, whether coming from the right or the left, that they fail to consider, and therefore study, how the music is actually used - or in Stuart Hall's terminology, *decoded* – by the users or consumers, and this may well not be in the same way it would have been *encoded* by its producers (Frith, 1983).

While being careful not to over-state the resistive tendencies of musical consumption, John Street claims that popular music can help its adherents to understand the world and therefore is *"one of the ways that we come to know who we are and what we want"* before disagreeing with the Frankfurt School's 'standardised product' critiques in his assessment that *"pop both unites and differentiates us in the pleasure that it gives us. In taking pleasure we grasp at what is ours alone, and we deny the right of the greedy and the powerful to some part of ourselves"* (Street, 1986: 226).

So whereas Fiske and others labelled as 'cultural populists' might posit the cultural consumer as doing just fine, in that through everyday creative consumption they exert all the power they need, postmodernist critics such as Baudrillard would counter that the consumption of popular culture can not, by its very nature, wield such power. Critical Marxist scholars such as Adorno might agree with Baudrillard's scepticism to some extent, but importantly would insist that political power is exerted through popular cultural engagement, but clearly not in the same direction as that optimistically read by the cultural

populists.

This thesis will go on to argue that none of these positions can provide a wholly adequate explanation of the events and (re)actions observed throughout this research, as no meaningful exertion of power was encouraged via the everyday, traditional, cultural activities of the supporters. However, meaningful power of an unexpected kind was possible via popular cultural engagement in this case, although it is recognised that the development of the required cultural environment may demand quite unusual circumstances.

The role played by certain 'formations' (Williams, 1977) - which in this case include independent supporter fanzines and campaign organisations, as well as the supporters' very own football club - is central to this thesis, and may provide an example of popular cultural engagement moving beyond the incorporated, ultimately passive opposition bemoaned by Clarke (1990), towards obtaining truly political impact which for Budd et al. (1990) would require *"alternative social organizations and subcultures"* (cited in Gibson, 2000: 257).

There are certainly elements of all these lines of argument that are helpful in attempts to understand the reactions of those in the culture under scrutiny, including at times the most critical Marxist or postmodernist accounts, as well as those that see more depth in popular cultural engagement. There is a sincere aim in this research to avoid a weak, uncritical or relativist conception of these largely contradictory perspectives, as findings point towards a (perhaps inevitable) failure of stridently prescriptive theories or paradigms which position culture as essentially compliant or resistant to dominant social structures.

Stauth and Turner (1988) follow a similar perspective when they criticise the 'implicit puritanism' of 'mass culture' critics, and instead argue for – similar to Bauman's ambivalence-laden 'Culture as Praxis' thesis (1999) – due recognition of the contradictions that exist in all kinds of culture. Mass culture, unlike what they describe as the more ingrained elitism of 'high culture', at least contains, according to Stauth and Turner, in-built democratising features which make possible the emergence of meaningful opposition to dominant structures.

Fans and Politics

Academic interest in the world of fandom has blossomed in recent decades, taking in not just sports fans but enthusiasts of television programmes, film genres, musical artists, literature

and indeed all aspects of popular, and not-so-popular cultural consumption (see Gray et al., 2007). The trajectory of much of this research has followed similar lines of debate to those discussed above, within what Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998: 15) termed the *"incorporation/resistance paradigm"*, so that questions of fan power, creativity, exploitation, and identity have provided the terrain over which scholars such as Henry Jenkins and Cornell Sandvoss have manoeuvred their analyses.

Within this field, Jonathan Gray (2007), in an interesting analysis of one scarcely-conceived genre of fandom – that surrounding television news, raises the issue of the extent to which emotion and rationality may shape the kind and level of engagement observed amongst fans, compared to what are seen as more politically-motivated 'citizens'. Specifically, Gray was interested in whether rational 'cerebral' thought and more emotional sentiment need to be considered quite the polar opposites in debates on fandom and political engagement, such as those stemming from Jürgen Habermas' concern for a more active, serious, and deliberately democratic public sphere (Habermas, 1989).

By drawing on the work of 'neuro-political' scientist George Marcus (see Marcus, 2002), Gray posits emotionality as an integral element of rational thought, so that the *"affective intelligence"* often observed within fandom, rather than acting as a countervailing or antagonistic influence to a more politicised, engaged public, is in fact a vital element in the development of what Marcus terms the *"sentimental citizen"* (Gray, 2007: 79). Such ideas are also found in the work of Van Zoonen (2005) who claims fan cultures contain the structures and characteristics – such as shared values, as well as an inclination and willingness to act on them – that would surely be necessary within the social formations of *"the ideal citizens of a deliberate democracy"* (Gray, 2007, 79).

In field research amongst football fans in Germany, the United States and the UK, Cornell Sandvoss (2003) uncovered a complex array of attitudes and dispositions towards political engagement, as well as around the fans' sense of their own fandom more generally. Utilising John Hartley's (1997) critique of Habermasian conceptualisations of the 'public sphere', Sandvoss positions popular culture and fandom, and particularly media consumption, in a more nuanced, and therefore potentially more positive, role than the pessimistic views of social theorists who lament the decline of public life and its replacement with a more individualised, mediated contemporary condition.

Hartley's view acknowledges that the form public political discourse now takes is as part of *"the larger postmodern public sphere"*, or following Yuri Lotman, what he terms the 'semiosphere', which is described further as *"where personal, family, political and cultural meanings are reproduced – a place where people make themselves out of the semiotic and other resources to hand"* (Hartley, 1997, cited in Sandvoss, 2003: 59).

Sandvoss uses this notion of the 'semiosphere' to conceptualise how football fans make sense of their place in the cultural world they inhabit, and particularly so of the object of their fandom, which for many acts as *"the fan's agent to the outside world... (and) it is here that the politics of everyday life manifest themselves"* (Sandvoss, 2003: 59). Interestingly, Sandvoss observes a process of negotiation between fan, club and wider political issues, with the club existing in a 'polysemic' space, thereby exhibiting different meanings for different fans.

It is due in part to the clubs' and football fandom's existence within the semiosphere, and increasingly within the mediaspehere, that Sandvoss positions fandom as a cultural space onto which fans are able to project their own meanings and values as part of the process of creating and maintaining what Hartley calls *"DIY citizenship"* (Sandvoss, 2003: 60). This bears relevance to the debates of the Frankfurt School, Fiske and Morley etc. over questions of consumer / audience power, and also concerns over individualisation and community expressed variously by Putnam, Giddens, Beck, Bauman et al. Football fandom therefore, as Sandvoss recognises, deserves continued qualitative assessment as an increasingly prominent area of contemporary cultural, social and political life.

It is not just the more discreet communities of 'obsessed' fanatics that can prove a valuable focus for studies into fandom, as Gray et al. (2007) observe, now that 'being a fan' is an everyday part of contemporary consumer culture. In fact, it is the very fact that fandom is such a 'taken-for-granted' element of the 'fabric' of modern life that makes it so deserving as a subject of study.

Because fans increasingly consume the object of their fandom in the same mass-mediated way that we all experience what's going on in the world, which extends to how we receive information about who to vote for, the cause of armed conflicts and the cause of economic crises, studying the complex ways understandings are negotiated through these means can have much wider implications and resonance. Indeed, Zygmunt Bauman, following

Castoriadis, observed that *"the trouble with the contemporary condition of our modern civilization is that it stopped questioning itself"* which he went on to describe as *"arguably the most urgent of services we owe our fellow humans and ourselves"* (cited in Gray et al., 2007: 9).

Hegemony, Habitus and Community

Of particular importance within the broad research context is that part of Antonio Gramsci's work that attempts to isolate the 'common sense' within cultural thinking. This is described by Gramsci as consisting of those pervasive notions which serve to normalise values that support the status quo, while in the process marginalising or demonising those values which threaten to unsettle dominant ways of thinking (Strinati 2004).

This is achieved through the maintenance of a dominant *hegemony* which holds up certain ways of thinking about the world as natural, providing an ideological norm that makes the continuation of conditions which favour the dominant class in society a much easier 'option' than any other imagined alternatives. This builds upon Marx's assertion that *"the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas"* (Marx and Engels, 1970). Important in Gramsci's concept is the recognition that hegemony must constantly be re-asserted within what is always a contested environment, and above all requires the consent of those that follow its logic. This leaves the possibility of hegemony being challenged, however unlikely that may be depending on the relative strength of the ruling ideas and any competitors.

Louis Althusser's separation of the 'ideological' from the 'repressive' apparatus used by the state to impose its will on 'the people', follows a similar line of neo-Marxist critique (Featherstone 1991; Cook 1996; Strinati 2004). Althusser's conception of ideology however implies a more formal, articulated system of dominance than the *"whole lived social process"* proposed in Gramsci's notion of hegemony, which is nevertheless characterised by the domination of certain ways of thinking and understanding, though always in relation to other, often challenging or oppositional, values and meanings;

> *"Hegemony is then not only the articulate upper level of 'ideology', nor are its forms of control only those ordinarily seen as 'manipulation' or 'indoctrination'. It is a whole body of practices and expectations, over the whole of living: our senses and assignments of energy, our shaping perceptions of ourselves and our world. It is a lived system of meanings and values - constitutive and constituting - which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming. It thus constitutes a sense of reality for most people in the society...It is, that is to say, in the strongest sense a*

culture, but a culture which has also to be seen as the lived dominance and subordination of particular classes" (Williams, 1977: 110)

Such a starting point helps us to place culture at the heart of the upkeep of dominant ideas, and also of course of any potential downfall of those ideas. For Gramsci therefore, dominant logic is reliant on the *"moral and cultural legitimation of political rule"* (Forgacs and Nowell-Smith, 1985: 52), a position which helps us to begin to recognise that barriers which stand in the way of critical political engagement can be found within everyday culture as well as in more particularised forms of popular culture. This research has also shown that barriers of both kinds can remain stubbornly in place in a wider sense even where relatively narrow cultural concerns become politicised. The difficulties inherent in attempting to establish alternative views on society, or in Gramscian language a 'counter hegemony', are naturally then of central concern.

Williams further champions Gramsci's concepts of *hegemony* and *counter-hegemony* as particularly suited to studies of culture in contemporary western democracies, given the difficulties many people living within such societies have with squaring their outwardly 'free' lives with those imagined in very different historical situations, which are perhaps more readily evoked via stark imagery of overt manipulation, domination and oppression. A counter hegemony can, according to Gramsci, be created in a relatively complex contemporary society through an alliance of various forms of struggle not ordinarily characterised as political or economic in nature, but which would emerge from the working or dominated class to become a hegemonic class of its own (Williams, 1977: 111).

No Manc is an Island

That football supporters don't exist in a social or cultural vacuum, and thus bring in beliefs and outlooks from other spheres of their lives, highlights the importance throughout this thesis to consider the events, actions and reactions alongside theoretical perspectives on the nature of wider contemporary society. Issues of *consumerism*, *individualism*, *exclusion*, *community* and *participation*, that impact upon football fans' worldview from both inside and outside the field of football fandom, are therefore of relevance in attempts to understand the motivations, values and implications of what is observed in the research field.

Of particular pertinence in this light, complementary to the long-standing debates on the active or passive nature of popular culture, are various critiques of the wider experience of contemporary social and cultural life, particularly around what many describe as a consumer

society. The insights of Zygmunt Bauman on consumption, lifestyle and political ambivalence have proved valuable, as has Ulrich Beck's work on the individual living in a so-called 'risk society'. Both of these theorists have been characterised, whether with a positive or negative tone, as *"zeitgeist"* sociologists (Skinner 2000, cited in Mythen 2005), on account of their influential macro theories on the contemporary sociological condition.

Links between the macro structures of wider - perhaps global - society, and the micro structures of everyday cultural interactions and the values that characterise them, have been analysed from various critical sociological perspectives, including by thinkers already discussed such as Williams, Foucault, Gramsci and the Frankfurt School critics. Added to this, Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of *field* and *habitus* constitute useful theoretical tools when investigating specific local interactions, with a view to placing their significance within broader social, cultural and political structures (Moi, 1991).

The theoretical and conceptual basis for the thesis is of course much broader, but Bourdieu's theoretical frameworks are indicative in attempts to position the research subject within wider sociological debates. Chief among these is the recognition that the research *field* - itself made up of many other overlapping fields with various conflicting or contradictory characteristics - is populated by a diverse range of individuals, each moving in and out of the field, bringing back and forth a wide range of values and understandings that compete and collude to make up their own contingent cultural *habitus*.

The research field therefore exists as an active constituent of contemporary British consumer culture, itself a symptom, as well as being a driver of, what has been termed late- or post-modernity. Bauman prefers the term 'liquid modernity' as it suggests the idea of contemporary life being constantly in flux, unable to hold its shape, so that when issues of identity are considered, Bauman talks of *"the feebleness, weakness, brevity and frailty of bonds"* (Rojek, 2004: 301).

This idea of a break away from traditional, 'modernist' ideas of identity and a solid social structure, is an important context for discussions on any aspect of popular culture, but particularly so when something as locally moored, at least notionally, as football fandom is considered. When the potential for cultural resistance is raised, sparked in this case by a sense of loss of local cultural affiliation and of deep engagement, of active participation and ultimately of ownership, then critiquing the nature and character of wider society is essential.

For Bauman, ‘liquid’ modern men and women live an ‘under-patterned’ existence, and therefore have an in-built expectation of change, and with that comes uncertainty and fear (Bauman, 2008). Contemporary consumer culture of course goes hand-in-hand with this, so that consumption becomes its literal self – the using up of goods, experiences, commodities, and far from there being an expectation of consumer commodities lasting, there is a tacit understanding that the consumer can not be satisfied for long, and must keep coming back for more (Blackshaw, 2005).

For the physical objects of consumer society, this manifests itself in designed obsolescence, and increasingly short life-spans, to bring that next moment of consumer purchase ever closer. For the consumption of experience, such as a holiday or attendance at a sporting event, which can last only via memories, invoked through cultural folklore or perhaps in photographs (and increasingly electronic digital images – even more ephemeral, often never to be given the honour of becoming a ‘real’ photograph stuck in an album for posterity) there is always the promise of a better outcome next time.

This ‘living from one moment to the next’ is perhaps not so new, but for Bauman, it is the *promise* of moving on or starting again from scratch that characterises contemporary consumer culture. This is juxtaposed in this light with the more solid bonds usually associated with modernity, in which 'modern' men and women lived with the consequences of their choices, because things were built to last, and importantly people expected things to last. Not just physical objects, but relationships with other modern men and women, bringing a sense of ownership and responsibility, which as well as applying to possessions and individual relationships, also applied to public life. Richard Sennett (1977), and more recently Robert Putnam (2000), lamented what they saw as a subsequent loss of a sense of community and of social bonds. Similar concerns had of course been raised prior to Sennett and Putnam, via Emile Durkheim (1893/1964) and Jane Jacobs (1965), and also famously in the work of Ferdinand Tönnies (1955) on the shift from a traditional, organic *Gemeinshaft* to a more individualised and self-interested *Gesselshaft*.

What reasons might there be for people to become more self-interested and maybe atomised, and therefore less willing to take part in social activities and relationships? Fear is a central theme of many of the above works, mainly linked to commodification, private property and social status. This is reflected in popular critiques of consumer society, such as Thorstein

Veblen's (1899/1970) account of what he termed *conspicuous* consumption at the turn of the 20th Century, in which members of consumer society's new 'Leisure Class' were cast as status seekers, out to project an image via their consumption choices, and more importantly, their abilities as consumers.

Similar critiques emerged via Vance Packard (1957), JK Galbraith (1958) and Stuart Ewen (1976), as well as Pierre Bourdieu (1984), in which as well as desire fuelling the consumption of status symbols, an attendant anxiety to *keep up with the Jones's* could also be observed within an ideology of meritocratic introspection (de Botton, 2004). Fear is also invoked in Ulrich Beck's observations of what he terms 'Risk Society', of a world marked more and more by individualisation, but in which individuals feel increasingly powerless to effect or influence any wider changes beyond their own narrow (usually consumer) choices (Beck, 1992).

Jürgen Habermas explicitly linked a perceived decrease in public participation and the rise in individualistic consumer culture with pessimistic outlooks on the potential for meaningful political engagement. Following a similar line to Sennett and Putnam in his focus on what he saw as the decline of the 'public sphere', caused by the 'descent' of what were once active public citizens into more passive, private consumers, Habermas warned that this represents *"a formidable barrier to translating whatever oppositional discourses are generated from cultural consumption into effective and organised political resistance"* (Gibson, 2000: 262).

Supporter Protests as Social Movements

A key consideration in terms of assessing the relevance of what was observed within Mancunian football culture, is how supporters organised themselves in opposition to the forces they felt were endangering their social and cultural world. A number of issues are raised in considering these questions of organisation – questions which are at once specific to this particular context but that also exist as key elements of social movement theory more generally: What was the background to these forms of organisation? How did the organisations constitute themselves? How did they conceive of themselves, and how did others conceive of them? What kind of tactics did they adopt? What cultural factors can be seen as enabling or debilitating to the various aims of the organisations? What were the roles of 'intellectuals' in these organisations? Were there clashes, contestations or unease between what Gramsci (1971) referred to as 'organic' and 'traditional' intellectuals?

The latter two questions above are of key methodological concern to this research, enquiring as they partly do into the nature of my own engagement, both in the local supporter culture itself and in producing a certain type of knowledge as a result of the research. Chapter 4, which considers the epistemological and ontological approach to the research as well as reflecting upon the nature of the knowledge produced, has such questions at its heart.

The questions preceding those however are inherent in the analyses contained in Chapter 7 of events surrounding the takeover of Manchester United in 2005, and the role (as well as history) of (and relationships between) the various organisations involved in the campaign to thwart Glazer's purchase of the club. The tensions that existed between some of these organisations, and the different approaches or tactics favoured by each, mirror in many ways those dynamics observed in previous social movement research, and therefore a brief review of relevant literature is instructive for these analyses.

Communication, Power and Understanding

Marx had recognised, by the middle of the 19th Century, that for any movement to challenge existing structures of power, it was necessary to create and encourage new ways of thinking about the economic, political, social and cultural world experienced by those the movement sought to mobilise in opposition to the perceived oppressors (Barker and Cox, 2002).

Later, Gramsci would stress the importance of forging a counter-hegemony, a different way of thinking - as common sense - about ourselves in relation to the world around us. Part of this would involve presenting views on historical and contemporary events and situations that are experienced, witnessed, created and understood from different perspectives than had been the case previously. This can happen in different ways in different circumstances. Barker and Cox (2002: 7) suggest that activists can develop new ways of thinking about power structures when they experience something that jars with previous conceptions of reality, such as experiencing police violence at demonstrations. The violence in such cases importantly being directed at 'us, the good guys' rather than against 'them, the bad guys' which conventional wisdom may have led onlookers, victims or even perpetrators to believe would generally be the case.

It can also occur through independently-produced media, such as radical newspapers or pamphlets, attendance at public meetings, or more recently via new media broadcasts or online reports. In Chapter 7, the independent production of supporter fanzines is, following

Redhead (1991) and Haynes (1995), held as a key factor in creating a critical outlet for fan discontent generally, and certainly so at Manchester United (Brown, 1998b). It was however the creation and development of independent supporter organisations and campaign groups that was perhaps most critical in creating a politicised appetite for resistance.

Within this, of key significance was the experience of the campaign against Glazer's takeover in forging a more militant mentality amongst sufficient numbers of fans, some of whom had not been engaged in previous campaigns. This helped to redefine the 'us and them' sensibilities (Fantasia, 1988; Klandermans, 1992) away from those traditionally found in English football culture.

Cultural Engagement and Counter Hegemony

In order to make sense of a complex cultural world, and particularly the tendencies within that for resistance or compliance, theoretical support from many sources is clearly beneficial. Complementing much of the Social Movements theory, Raymond Williams provides some helpful terminology via his exploration of how Marxist thought has been and can be applied to studies of culture (Williams, 1977). Two separate yet related sets of terms are used by Williams to provide a framework for understanding where oppositional movements may occur, and also to recognise where instances of opposition may not be so radical, and of occurrences of incorporation into and by mainstream or dominant powers. To this end, Williams refers to three important cultural domains – *Traditions*, *Institutions* and *Formations*, as well as three types of cultural engagement - the *Dominant*, the *Residual* and the *Emergent* (Williams, 1977).

Williams observed that traditions were more than inert ideas about what was done in the past, they are actually an active, constituting force in the hegemonic maintenance of cultures. Hegemony is vital in this process, which consists of the selective incorporation of various elements of the 'shaping' past in order to validate the present and future, making it *"powerfully operative in the process of social and cultural definition and identification"* (Williams, 1977: 115).

Tradition then can provide 'predisposed continuity' to those seeking to authenticate their control of the culture, but the selective nature of the process must always leave certain elements in the past, and it is here, according to Williams, where established 'official' tradition can be challenged. Football supporter culture, or at least what has been described as

independent or even 'traditional' supporter culture, certainly rests to a large extent on such 'discarded' or unofficial elements of the game's or a club's past. This might include nostalgic reminiscences in fanzines about violent clashes with rival fans, or debates in the pub on terrace fashions of previous decades, or songs in the stadium that in their use of language or subject matter manage to avoid incorporation into marketable slogans to be printed on club merchandise.

All of these traditions – whether official or otherwise – require what Williams called an 'identifiable institution' around which they are established. As well as the football club, independent supporter culture has created other sub-institutions such as independent supporter organisations and fanzines around which certain traditions can develop and provide a cultural trajectory of their own. This is always subordinate to the 'parent' institution, even to a large extent in the case of FC United of Manchester, whose cultural traditions remained rooted in the history of Manchester United, albeit perhaps relatively more in the 'discarded' fragments of the club's past than its continuing present.

Manchester United's independent supporter culture, including FC United, would also very much fit Williams' definition of a cultural *formation*, upon which it is argued the establishment of tradition also relies. Formations then, are *"those effective movements and tendencies, in intellectual and artistic life, which have significant and sometimes decisive influence on the active development of a culture, and which have a variable and often oblique relation to formal institutions"* (Williams, 1977: 117). These formations can clearly take many different forms, and Williams uses their respective relation to the formal institutions to define three main types of formation that are useful in determining the relative tendencies for hegemony or counter hegemony.

Closest to the formal institutions are the *dominant* cultural formations which of course would trouble the dominant hegemony very little, accepting and engaging with the formal institution's version of culture, staying within the officially defined boundaries of cultural tradition. The *residual* however, would draw upon a cultural tradition that the formal institution may largely reject, yet would remain tied in fundamental ways to the formally sanctioned culture. Williams is careful to distinguish the residual from what he calls the *archaic*, which would be those cultural elements known as being wholly of the past, consigned only to memory, perhaps occasionally deliberately and temporarily revived. The residual in Manchester United's supporter culture may account for aspects such as the

development of the fanzine movement and campaign-based organisations, hooligan firms or perhaps elements of the travelling support.

The residual *"has been effectively formed in the past, but it is still active in the cultural process, not only and often not at all as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present"* (Williams, 1977: 122). This means that while not officially sanctioned, and in many cases being the focus of overt disapproval by the formal institution, these residual cultural forms continue to have a creative and active role in the ongoing development of the culture, and therefore can represent at least a challenge to dominant hegemony, even as the shadow of incorporation remains in view. Such a residual role would become the focus of much reflection for many independently organised Manchester United fans, as detailed in later chapters, as their increasingly compromised cultural and political values rubbed up against an ever-imposing dominant reality.

An *emergent* cultural formation must face up to such ambiguities and reject incorporation into, or support of, the dominant culture, as it creates *"new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationship"* (Williams, 1977: 123). I would argue that Manchester United supporters moved tentatively towards an emergent formation as they resisted the takeover of their club in 2005, then made the decision - in defeat - to boycott, before going on to form FC United of Manchester.

Whether a fully emergent cultural formation was created, and at what points significant transformations in this regard might have occurred is a much more difficult question. Acknowledging the inherent fluidity in the definitions of such terms, particularly in the relationship between the residual and the emergent, and in the task of applying such labels to the cultural formations observed here must be considered carefully, and perhaps it is in the supporters' own reflections on what has been described as their 'shaping walk' (Brady, 2006), that the most telling findings are to be found.

Williams recognises the difficulty in distinguishing emerging cultural elements that represent little more than a novel variation or progression of the dominant culture, or something that is in Williams' words 'species specific', with something that is truly or substantially oppositional. This aims straight to the heart of debates within supporter culture around whether FC United is in effect something for, and perhaps of, a different 'species' than not only Manchester United supporter culture, but also football supporter culture more generally.

This was a crisis of identity for many fans, and much like the observed re-assertion of Mancunian identity when such credentials were being questioned in the 1990s (King, 1998; Brown, 2004), FC United fans could be observed, in line with Williams' assertion, to be 'reaching back' towards meanings and values from the past, in order to retain an anchor to their cultural heritage. The extent to which that 'harking back' also brings the risk of (re)incorporation into the dominant culture, via what Marx and Engels warned can be a stubborn, counter-revolutionary 'muck of ages' (Barker, 1995), is also explored in later chapters.

While many emerging aspects of the culture, such as an insistence of fan ownership and democratic structure, were immediately grasped and cherished by FC United supporters, there was clearly some insecurity regarding their status as Manchester United supporters. This is highlighted in a perceived need for acceptance as 'still' being Manchester United supporters by what could be called the parent culture. Williams recognises the dangers to true emergence of such cultural insecurity, which can lead to a blurring of lines between practical incorporation and receiving wider recognition and acceptance: *"in this complex process there is indeed regular confusion between the locally residual (as a form of resistance to incorporation) and the generally emergent"* (Williams, 1977: 125).

This yearning, within the emergent culture, for acceptance by certain elements closer to or within the dominant culture it has rejected, is due to an ongoing dominant hegemony over what defines social and cultural boundaries. Outside of those boundaries would be the cultural values and meanings that the emergent culture regards as most important – important enough in fact to adopt a position that can allow those values to flourish, even if that meant painfully stepping out of the hegemonically-defined cultural boundary. In the case of FC United supporters, while their ongoing boycott of Manchester United matches and various other kinds of engagement might be maintained, for many a temptation still remained to dip back inside that boundary, whether in moments of weakness or with fully reflexive justification.

Following Williams' line of argument, part of the reason for the difficulty in maintaining a separation from the sphere of dominant culture is that in a contemporary world of globalisation and new media, in which ever more aspects of social interaction are mediated and commodified, the reach of the dominant culture is much broader and more intrusive than

ever before, making the task of an emergent cultural formation much more difficult. It is possible that what we observe may ultimately turn out to have been a 'pre-emergence': *"active and pressing, but not yet fully articulated, rather than the evident emergence which could be more confidently named"* (Williams, 1977: 126).

Such qualifications aside, Williams' concepts of *dominant*, *residual* and *emergent* streams within culture provide a useful theoretical framework with which to consider the various cultural and political reactions of football supporters to structuring forces encountered. The empirical chapters which chart these parallel, often conflicting, cultural formations are themed along similar, though certainly not precisely so, conceptual lines. Firstly, Chapter 6 focuses on those aspects of English football supporter culture that tend to follow more compliantly the *dominant* cultural path. More oppositional, *residual* tendencies are explored in Chapter 7, with a particular focus on those independent supporter movements that sought, to bring forward a phrase from within the campaign discourse, to 'fight from within'.

The final two empirical chapters look in more detail at FC United of Manchester, a development which potentially represents something quite radical in English football supporter culture. Chapter 8 details the principles and rationale behind this *emergent* club, and also contemplates some of the problems and challenges faced by its supporter-owners. Finally, the implications for the cultural identifications of these fans, whose voice is aired via a selection of autobiographical accounts, is considered in Chapter 9 alongside the potential therein for wider political engagement.

Before examining the research findings however, the following two chapters focus on the methods employed in gathering and analysing that empirical data.

PART TWO

METHODS

This section contains two chapters that document and reflect on the research methods employed.

Chapter 4 provides a review of methodological theory relevant to the context of this research project. Central to this is a critical and reflexive review of influential literature that considers the epistemological and ontological position of the researcher.

Chapter 5 sets out how the approach detailed in the previous chapter actually played out in the research field.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH: EPISTEMOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND INFLUENCES

My position as researcher has been a consistent source of reflexive concern throughout. This chapter articulates these considerations by critically reviewing influential research methods literature, while keeping in mind the relationship between the researcher's epistemological position and the focus of the research project itself. The methods employed therefore are seen to ideally remain consistent with, and complementary to, not only the critical paradigm of the researcher, but also the theoretical and conceptual focus of the thesis.

An immersed participant observation, or perhaps more accurately an 'observing participant' approach (Wacquant, 2004, cited in Woodward, 2008: 553), was taken along with primary data collection via interviews and discourse analysis. How the adoption of this approach actually played out in the research field is the focus of Chapter 5.

Method and Paradigm

As noted by Guba and Lincoln (1994), in merely describing the nature of research as either qualitative or quantitative, we fail to adequately outline the underlying perspectives from which the whole research project, including its methods, was conceived and undertaken. Accordingly, it is also necessary to make clear the *paradigm* through which the researcher went about his or her task. Guba and Lincoln define a paradigm as *"the basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator, not only in choices of method but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways"* (Guba and Lincoln, 1994: 105).

Thus, by laying out in stark terms the kinds of assumptions and perspectives that come from approaching the research with a certain worldview, a more open and honest appraisal can be made as to the implications for judging the validity and relevance of any findings. In order to paradigmatically position oneself as a researcher therefore, ontological and epistemological perspectives must first be acknowledged in order to fully justify a particular methodological approach.

Guba and Lincoln suggest that such an admittedly 'broad brush stroke' exercise would help

place the 'social science researcher' into one of four major paradigm perspectives: *'positivism'*, *'post-positivism'*, *'critical theory et al.'* or *'constructivism'*, though they accept that for the latter three positions at least, there remains the potential for further development and contestation, which one presumes would allow for various sub-paradigms and even overlaps to confuse the process (Guba and Lincoln, 1994: 109).

The relative perspectives espoused by each of the four paradigms included here generally represent the gradual shift away from the so-called 'hard science' of positivism, with its insistence on universal truths as it attempts to strip down data gathering methods to avoid contamination of the field, through to more critical approaches which acknowledge the situated-ness of received knowledge, and relish the possibilities of providing and facilitating new insights that necessitate interaction with the research field.

My own research position has been fairly emphatically staked at the more critical and subjective end of that process, in that my ontological stance has it that there is no absolute, incontestable truth waiting to be uncovered in terms of a social reality. It would follow then that the epistemological role of the researcher would be to analyse what they can see happening, who is doing it, what reasons they give and so on, in order to interpret what underlying values and meanings can be uncovered and made sense of.

Kincheloe and McLaren (1994: 139) line up such a stance alongside the critical research strands that emerged from the *"politically charged atmosphere of the 1960s"*. Seeking to break away from an academic tradition they despairingly saw as still entrenched in *"a post-Enlightenment culture nurtured by capitalism"*, their resultant academic critiques shared a *"dialectical concern with the social construction of experience"* and represented self-conscious *"manifestations of the discourses and power relations of the social and historical contexts that produced them"* (ibid: 139).

Given this standpoint, once applied consistently, the lines quickly become blurred not only between ontology and episteme, but also between the worlds of researcher and researched. In my case I was already an active part of the research field when I took on the role of researcher, so in a sense that line had already been crossed. This recognition that I already held a certain worldview, and an engaged perspective on the research field in particular, was a cause of methodological concern in the early stages of the research.

That this initial paradigm was significantly altered during the course of the research - as a result of my engagement as both academic researcher and as active participant - certainly lessened such anxieties. If research is about discovery, then surely it shouldn't shun self-discovery, which after all reveals a level of openness to what is discovered. The relative subjective insecurity of my initial approach is perhaps observable in the way I questioned my own place in the research at that time;

Was the research merely a means of confirming more formally an already existing understanding? If so, did that approach bring a greater risk of skewing the results through a compromised selection of research methods and choice of subject? How could sub-conscious bias be avoided? If such obstacles were successfully negotiated, how would I react in instances where the observed understandings of others sat uncomfortably with my own understandings or expectations? Above all, how could I ensure that my research would be sufficiently rigorous or 'professional', in line with established academic expectation?

While such doubts may reveal the pervasiveness of modernity's concern with objectivity and the rigorous application of standard measures and categories, this doesn't invalidate them as questions with which the researcher should be concerned. It can be claimed that asking such questions is a healthy and even necessary process for any researcher, in order to iron out any 'undue' bias and even to consolidate the researcher's view of his or her role, maybe - in this case - by accepting the futility or undesirability of seeking total objectivity.

These concerns did taper off as the research progressed, particularly once the nature of analysis took a more explicitly 'political turn'. The summer of 2005 marked a significant break, away in some respects from what were relatively dislocated perceptions of a complex interplay between *authenticity*, *local identity* and *globalisation*. All of these concepts remained important, but until this point I had not articulated the key significance of the research context. I knew there was something important to say, but was yet to find a way of organising and understanding this 'complex interplay' in a focused or effective way.

The early stages of the research process therefore were concerned with sharpening the focus on how Manchester's football culture could offer a valuable insight into the intersection of these rather broadly defined concepts. It was only when the powerful social and political reverberations that came from the protests against the takeover of Manchester United in 2005 were experienced first-hand, as detailed in the field accounts detailed in Chapter Three,

that I started to realise how this issue acutely crystallised what I had been struggling to make sense of within the uneasy meeting places of global flows and local sensibilities experienced within Mancunian football culture.

Macro and Micro Perspectives

The focal point of my analysis has tended to rest more on observing and sharing the experiences and reactions of the social actors at a micro level than it has on the structure(s) within which all this took place, although the macro level certainly can not be ignored, and nor should it, for there is surely no good reason why focusing on one must relegate the other to insignificance. But this research was primarily about culture, with a strong recognition that culture touches, and is touched by, all the other categories of life that less critically-oriented research may have perhaps tended to segregate during academic analyses.

> *"Positivist science is at its best when describing the real. It falls to its all-time low when asked to discuss the possible... It is here, we think, that the concept of culture comes in"*
>
> (Bauman, 1999: 134)

Bauman then, while acknowledging the particular strengths of positivist approaches to research, is careful to stress its limits in terms of not just reflecting what can be seen, but - following Johan Galtung - assessing what might be possible in society and culture. This would require a sociology that is brave enough to imagine conditions different to those discovered or observed empirically, so that alternative futures could at least be considered, even if only by highlighting those factors which make such an alternative unlikely or impossible under present conditions (Bauman, 1999: 139).

The ontological and epistemological assumption of this research project therefore, is that the micro-level of social and political life – the everyday cultural interactions of 'ordinary' individuals, and the values and meanings that they attach to them – is significant, not just locally or confined to that micro-level, but potentially also in a wider cultural, social and political sense. This of course provides the researcher with the responsibility of 'understanding the understandings' that are expressed in various ways by others engaged in the research field. The politically charged *'turning point'* (Smith, 1994) of the summer of 2005 while immersed in the field, did more than anything else to sharpen that thinking. Accordingly, I doubt very much that a more distanced perspective could have had such an effect.

Likewise, John Fiske's (1994) appraisal of 'audiencing' within the particular research field of capitalist-consumer culture of the late 1980's USA, provides a useful account of how, even within a broadly defined paradigm such as that labelled above as *'critical theory et al.'* by Guba and Lincoln (1994), different approaches can exert significantly varied influences on research methods. Comparing two strands of what might also be termed critical Marxist paradigms - *'political economy'* and *'ideology theory'* - with his own preferred agency-centred perspective on cultural studies, all of which he positions under the 'critical theory et al.' banner, Fiske identifies how an over-emphasis on the dominant, structuring, influence of capitalism can result in a failure to recognise the rich variety of cultural meanings and values, created both in resisting and complying with 'the system' (Fiske, 1994).

So whereby these two structurally-centred approaches certainly share a critical concern with cultural studies that the stifling and exploitative effects of capitalism should be opposed, Fiske feels that by focusing too much on the commodity or the text, rather than on the people consuming or reading it, these approaches can only identify what would be seen as a dismaying picture of submissive and blind acceptance within capitalism's domineering structures. By examining the micro-level of people's everyday lives however, we can also bring into view those instances whereby the dominant structure is resisted or subverted through opposition or cultural appropriation (Fiske, 1994).

Zygmunt Bauman has also observed how transformations in the nature of society have necessitated taking a closer look at what is happening 'on the ground', rather than maintaining the distance that came with more reductionist analyses of modernity's supposedly all-pervasive social structures and systems. The 'patterned' lives experienced under conditions of 'modernity' have, according to Bauman, been replaced by the *'underpatterned'* existences within what he terms *'liquid modernity'* (Blackshaw, 2005).

Bauman invokes Ulrich Beck's concern that individuals are having to seek *"a biographical solution to systemic contradictions"* (Blackshaw 2005: 92) as they try to make sense of what the world is bringing to their doorstep. It is crucial therefore, if we are to develop a deeper understanding of how society, culture and individuals are reacting to these wider processes, that we immerse ourselves in what is actually happening in people's everyday lives, and watch closely.

So, while we can identify that certain structural processes are intersecting in the cultural world of football supporters in Manchester, it is not quite enough to describe these processes and explain, for instance, how this might highlight what happens when 'the local' is impinged upon by 'the global'. Through my engagement in this cultural world, I have been able to observe how dynamic mixtures of individual and group sensibilities – linked variously to social, cultural and political affiliations and standpoints – are brought to bear in very specific ways. If we only look at the system's intentions, we are effectively neglecting the possibility that people might have the agency to refuse to play their part in its smooth operation.

At this point I must emphasise caution in highlighting the potential empowerment or resistance of individuals displaying creative appropriation in their consumption of capitalist commodities. There has been a tendency within cultural studies to shy away from taking too critical a stance on such matters, for fear of showing undue disrespect to the cultural subjects under investigation, hence the popularity for example of de Certeau's or Fiske's more 'agentic' perspectives, approaches often labelled with the negative connotations of 'cultural populism'(McGuigan 1999; Gibson 2000; Schor 2007). As well as the risk of overlooking some more critical accompanying elements of these works, such as Fiske's ready acknowledgement of capitalism's over-arching dominance, such a timid approach can ultimately prove more patronising than the Frankfurt School-style scything critiques they seek to avoid.

My aim in this study then is to recognise where resistance is being attempted, while keeping a keen eye on the barriers, contradictions and limitations that present themselves. The result is intended to be a critical account of the power of global capitalism, individualism, consumerism and notions of community and authenticity, while attempting to highlight examples of meaningful opposition and its attendant social, cultural and political empowerment. While not wishing to hide a wish to see the rise of the latter, I retain a healthy scepticism that recognises the huge influence of the former.

Maintaining a Critical Perspective

Kincheloe and McLaren provide an extensive breakdown of various 'basic assumptions' they feel are generally made by the 'critical researcher', which I reproduce here in full as I feel it holds much prescience in relation to my own research perspective, so these assumptions are…;

"that all thought is fundamentally mediated by power relations that are social and historically constituted; that facts can never be isolated from the domain of values or removed from some form of ideological inscription; that the relationship between concept and object and between signifier and signified is never stable or fixed and is often mediated by the social relations of capitalist production and consumption; that language is central to the formation of subjectivity (conscious and unconscious awareness); that certain groups in any society are privileged over others and, although the reasons for this privileging may vary widely, the oppression that characterizes contemporary societies is most forcefully reproduced when subordinates accept their social status as natural, necessary, or inevitable; that oppression has many faces and that focusing on only one at the expense of others (e.g., class oppression versus racism) often elides the interconnections among them; and, finally, that mainstream research practices are generally, although most often unwittingly, implicated in the reproduction of systems of class, race, and gender oppression"

(Kincheloe and McLaren, 1994: 139-140).

This critical perspective is attributed in part at least to the demystifying effects of postmodernism, but care is taken to stress that the breaking down of formerly rigid structures that served to stifle such critical viewpoints can also produce more conservative ways of thinking about the world. Accordingly, a tendency towards ironic scepticism is recognised within academia and elsewhere, that consciously avoids making assumptions that would lead to research with an agenda of 'purposeful action' or 'transformation' (Kincheloe and McLaren, 1994: 141).

An impulse to reign in critical assessments of the cultural world is certainly tempting within academia and elsewhere, perhaps due to a desire to pacify the above sceptics who, it is anticipated, would make accusations of naivety and over-simplistic readings, which do not appreciate the complex dynamics of deep-lying structures and processes, and worse still - according to the cultural populist perspective - disrespect or under-estimate 'ordinary' people.

This can result in the unedifying spectacle of defenders of the free market – often those representing organisations that openly trade in 'delivering' consumers or voters, such as advertising agencies or commercial media companies – jumping disingenuously to the defence of the 'active, free-willed individual' when a critical spotlight is turned on their practices. Of course, their clients who pay so much for their services one way or another, particularly political parties, defend the 'agentic' consumer/voter with still greater ferocity, casting critics in the role of elitist, almost Quixotic would-be defenders of people who neither need nor appreciate the misguided and patronising tilting at harmless (yet clearly necessary) windmills. The populist label is quite accurate here, as of course it is much easier to accept a duplicitous compliment than a paternal, or especially fraternal, slight, however

well intentioned.

Within this wider environment, recognising academia's impulse to dampen down certain critical assessments amidst lingering overtures of positivist reason is I feel an important step to take in becoming a more critically engaged researcher. I have been aided in this respect by what I have observed as similar power relationships operating within the cultural habitus of this research field, which also often manifest themselves in disagreements as to what constitutes an honest and open debate. The niggling doubts of scientific pragmatism described above can lead to the display of what would be an ultimately dishonest pretence of objectivity or neutrality, however well intentioned calls for such positions might be. The 'common sense' idea that only value-neutral arguments can be valid, competent or trustworthy merely leads to a stifling of open, critical and (what I see as) healthy debate, in which everyone's cards are on the table for all to see.

> *"any treatment of cultural practice that neglects the role of commodity production and circulation in cultural production and consumption (Schiller 1989), the organization of time and space according to the needs of capitalist accumulation (Harvey 1992), and the expansion of capitalist forms of social organization into the sphere of leisure in the postwar period (Jhally1987) would be woefully incomplete"*
>
> (Gibson, 2000: 271).

A starting assumption that the cultural text under scrutiny is not in any way ideologically inflected results in the reader being fooled into handing over their own responsibilities for critical appraisal to the creator of the text, and because the agenda is then hidden away (whether consciously or subconsciously) such a reading merely serves an ideology of neutral inaction and passive acceptance, reflected in such conclusions as *'It's a shame, but that's just the way of the world'*.

This theme is taken up once again shortly when the issue of media and academic 'bias' is reviewed, but a quick note on similar concerns stemming from the research field may shed some light on how such a perspective came to be adopted: FC United is a football club that was born amidst passionate resistance to normative ways of viewing a supporter's relationship to their football club. As such, FC United is widely seen as representing a harsh critique of the ways in which top-level football clubs are run, but in particular they are seen as being most antagonistic towards the current regime at Manchester United – which is not surprising as the protests from which the club grew were focused on a fierce resistance to Malcolm Glazer's takeover.

This has led to a great deal of acrimony amongst Manchester United supporters – between those who see FC United as being anti-Manchester United, as 'splitters' or 'turncoats', and those who see FC United as being a force for good within Manchester United's supporter culture, representing a positive inspiration for the club's future development. Publicly, Manchester United have not hidden their contempt for FC United, with manager Alex Ferguson publicly criticising the club on a number of occasions, and local journalists who had reported on FC claiming to have been threatened with sanctions by Manchester United's PR representatives (Author's interview notes).

Such developments have led many FC United fans to seek to 'build bridges' by playing down the acrimonious issues that gave rise to the situation initially, and conversely by playing up the level of affection FC United fans have for the current Manchester United team. This fear of marginalisation (from the 'parent club') has led for instance to a number of supporter-initiated 'United United Days' in which fans are encouraged to bring United-supporting friends along to particular games, so they could see for themselves that 'we are still United' (see Appendix 6).

In 2008, Liverpool supporters set up their own team in the form of AFC Liverpool, following a series of public protests over Liverpool's joint-owners Tom Hicks and Steve Gillette. Statements from those behind AFC Liverpool stressed the same concerns held by United fans over ticket prices, access for young, local fans and the importance of a football club having genuine community links. They were very careful to stress though that they were not against the current regime at Anfield, and as such they did not envisage their supporters to be 'boycotters' but as Liverpool fans who also went to Liverpool games, or those who could not afford it.

FC United fans observed developments with keen interest, particularly when AFC Liverpool announced that they had secured the 'backing' of Liverpool Chief Executive Rick Parry and that the new team would feature in a regular slot on Liverpool FC's in-house satellite subscription TV channel LFC.TV. The people behind AFC Liverpool then, in different and less acrimonious circumstances, had decided to take a more pragmatic, less confrontational approach.

Debate amongst FC United fans has on the whole revealed a great deal of scepticism and

even bewilderment that AFC Liverpool appear to be accepting, as a fact of life, that many fans can not afford to watch their team play, and instead of trying to oppose this situation are instead merely providing an affordable alternative, while simultaneously entering into a partnership with those keeping the prices out of reach of its own fans.

It is acknowledged that FC United also provides such a 'safety net' for United fans, but it is widely understood that they also seek to oppose and resist the reasons for fans' exclusion. This culture of opposition and resistance was fostered throughout the preceding decades of independent supporter organisation amongst Manchester United's support, and as observed in more detail elsewhere, this made an antagonistic position towards the club's owners much less difficult to adopt throughout the 2005 takeover campaign and beyond.

Concern over falling crowds however led some FC United supporters to suggest that AFC Liverpool's pragmatic 'path of least resistance' approach may be the way forward for FC United, at least in terms of ensuring that the club is seen in a positive light by what most see as its future lifeblood – Manchester United supporters. What such a suggestion is inferring is in effect that FC United should abandon their overtly critical stance towards the regime at Old Trafford and attempt to 'soften' their image in the minds of the average Manchester United fan.

This is where a direct parallel can be drawn with the question of academic 'neutrality', in that the pressures placed on academics, as described earlier, to take the sharp edges off overtly critical approaches to research for fear of being marginalised as 'cranks' or naïve dreamers, who can not accept the necessary 'realities' of the world (as viewed by more pragmatic observers), contain much the same principles as those pressures applied to the more critically orientated within other cultural spheres, such as social movements, politics, the media and in this case, a 'rebel' football club.

So my 'biased' opinion within the wider cultural world is consistent with my value-laden perspective within academia, that being critical and not being afraid to 'take sides' is vital in ensuring open and reflectively honest accounts and debates. Those FC United fans who argue for a more pragmatic approach, such as that taken by AFC Liverpool, are therefore advocating that the *ends* of survival and commercial progress justify the *means* of being less than open about FC United's ongoing critical stance.

I would suggest that there is more than enough pragmatic acceptance of, and pragmatic incorporation into, 'the real world' in both football supporter culture and in academia, and perhaps such off-hand dismissals of overtly purposeful action serve to maintain the conditions which not many admit to liking, but to which so many appear resigned. I would therefore follow Eduardo Galeano's rebuttal of the everyday common-sense thinking that insists we should forget utopian ideals - perhaps as we come to terms with what Simmel recognised as the 'tragedy' of culture - and must stack up the relative emphasis we place on 'means' and 'ends': *"Utopia is on the horizon: I walk two steps, it takes two steps back. I walk ten steps and it is ten steps further away. What is utopia for? It is for this, for walking"* (cited in Shukaitis and Graeber, 2007: 33).

What difference does it make?

A key observation that John Fiske makes, with particular resonance for the research subject of this thesis, is that if we are interested in identifying within culture new or alternative meanings and values that could potentially throw new light on the way people see society, and therefore resist the dominant structures of capitalism, we must look out for the unusual and the novel within culture, rather than dismiss it as irrelevant or merely a 'glitch' in an otherwise all-pervading system (Fiske, 2004).

Within this research context it is clear that the football supporter culture of Manchester contains both the compliant majority and the resistant minority, so doubts naturally arise which question why so much focus should be placed on the resistive elements observed. Particularly when the case of FC United is presented, there is an initial tendency from some to wonder just what difference such minority opposition makes.

From a macro level it is indeed tempting to dismiss FC United and the preceding protest movement as little more than a quirky blip within an otherwise classic picture of global capitalism's stranglehold over popular culture.

After all, Manchester United continued to attract average crowds of around 70,000 following the 2005 takeover, with only 2-3,000 watching FC United matches, so what can such a peripheral concern tell us about even Manchester United's fan culture, let alone cultural reactions to global capitalism more generally?

I was asked such questions regularly when presenting my ongoing research at seminars and

conferences, particularly when I was still struggling to put my finger on the answers myself during the immediate post-takeover cultural fallout. What I attempted to explain in these situations was that the effect on those fans opposing the takeover, who had made such a significant cultural decision in their lives by boycotting their football club, was of prime concern in my research, rather than the events necessarily representing a burgeoning fans' revolution.

Similar questions had in fact been posed by fellow supporters as I contemplated boycotting Manchester United in the weeks following the takeover. While in Cardiff for the 2005 FA Cup Final, which was to be the last match attended before my decision to boycott was finalised, various friends questioned my rationale for giving up my season ticket. 'There'll be ten more lining up to take your place' and 'most fans don't give a shit about stuff like this, so why bother?' were the standard claims and challenges put forward in defence of their view that taking such a radical step was hugely misguided (a fuller auto-ethnographic account of this day is provided in Chapter 5).

Such sentiment reveals a similar kind of defeatism to that shown by some of the systemic-reductionist scholars Fiske referred to, who although perhaps morally opposing and bemoaning the pervasiveness of 'the system', often fail to recognise the legitimacy and therefore the potential power of minority or individual acts of resistance (Fiske, 2004).

By going on to question my match-going friends' reliance on numerical advantage to validate maintaining their standpoint, I inadvertently touched upon something of a raw nerve that exists within supporters' sensibilities by offending their sense of loyalty, via the inherent suggestion that being an authentic football fan was not supposed to be about 'following the crowd', but 'following your heart'. Notions of authenticity within football culture are permeated by such gushing and clichéd sentiments of undying love and irrational commitment.

Indeed, a particularly telling observation made during the course of this research is that while fans regularly express such sentimental feelings through songs, banners, mottos and general discourse, and despite expressing grave concerns and even grieving for lost or dying cultural activities, values, places and symbols, the commonplace reaction when faced with a choice of resistance or compliance seems not to be so romantic, but is usually one of pragmatism and defeatism… *'we may not like it, but that's the way of the world'*.

My belief in the power of culture to facilitate social change was brought into sharp focus when the decision to boycott came to be considered in 2005, albeit without consciously raising my sights at the time very much above and beyond my concerns with the future of Manchester United. Though I did not realise it until later, it was also a 'real life' challenge to my stance as a researcher of culture and society, in that if I hadn't have had the conviction to 'make a stand' on my own cultural turf, I may not have been as capable of maintaining an authentically critical stance as an engaged cultural studies researcher.

Therefore, when studying culture my belief is that we should seek out and embrace subversive and minority cultures and subcultures, as they are the areas of 'real life' that are likely to provide substantial insights into whatever possibilities there might be for culture to effect positive social change. Observing as a researcher the creation and development of such a resistive cultural phenomenon has been more than valuable, but being able to experience this simultaneously as an engaged participant has, I feel, added much more in terms of critical insight and naturalistic perspective than would have been possible had I adopted a more hands-off approach via a perhaps less dynamic paradigm.

Once we recognise that there is something happening that seeks to oppose the dominating structures that largely govern a cultural field, no matter how peripheral it may be from a macro perspective, it becomes of interest to those of us who invest culture with the potential for meaningful resistance. As Fiske points out *"social change typically originates in marginalised or subordinated minorities and, as cultural studies has a political stake in social change, it requires a model that allows the marginal, the deviant, and the abnormal to be always granted significance"* (Fiske, 1994: 196).

Raymond Williams took a similar perspective when outlining the continually negotiated, or at least in some ways contested, position of hegemony in cultural life by pointing out that dominant ideologies are regularly placed under pressure by competing or opposing ideas and values that emerge from *"the efforts and contributions of those who are in one way or another outside or at the edge of the terms of the specific hegemony"* (Williams, 1977: 113). Recognising that popular culture can contain oppositional and resistive ideas and tendencies, while being careful not to read such characteristics into aspects of cultural difference where resistance doesn't exist, is key to attempts to avoid the overly celebratory studies that cultural studies has produced in its attempt to steer too wide a course away from the Marxist

critiques many felt went too far in their negative portrayal of working class culture.

If I had decided at the start of this research project that there was a reductive or totalising cultural system out there, and set out accordingly to map how a certain cultural field operates within that, it would have restricted me to a more detached methodological approach as I attempted to ensure that my presence didn't unduly interfere with this process.

Whether this could have been achieved I very much doubt, even if a less familiar field had been selected with this in mind, but if it had, much more emphasis would have naturally been placed on the intended effects of the system rather than the various reactions of the different actors within it.

Even by sticking with the field of study that I did, an adoption of the above 'macro' perspective in my approach wouldn't I'm sure have overlooked the existence of the fans' protests or FC United, but would have certainly rendered as less significant the various motives, hopes, aspirations and ideologies of those taking part, when faced with the overwhelming evidence of the system being validated and maintained by the mainstream majority.

The lack of engagement such an approach allows with the field would in itself have meant forfeiting a deep analysis of the rich cultural values and meanings of those involved, severely diminishing any insights into the cultural and political significance of such a cultural 'abnormality'. One of the methods applied to examine the everyday values and meanings observable within this 'marginal' cultural domain was critical discourse analysis.

Critical Discourse Analysis

In applying the relatively broad term 'discourse analysis' to the description of my methodological approach, a clear necessity arises to clarify the type and level of analysis undertaken. Discourse analysis, as defined by Tuen Van Dijk (2003), can be applied from a number of 'levels' which can be broadly conceived as either *micro*, *meso* or *macro* perspectives. Van Dijk though does emphasise that the 'gaps' we may perceive between these levels are in themselves sociologically constructed (Van Dijk, 2003: 354).

Any analysis conducted as part of this research project is of a distinctly critical nature, and the utilisation of discourse analysis within this critical tradition is well established in

academic fields as diverse as linguistics, psychology, sociology, human geography and media studies (Wetherell et al, 2001). Norman Fairclough, one of the foremost proponents of critical discourse analysis, describes the method as *"a resource which can be used in combination with others for researching change in contemporary social life – including current social scientific concerns such as globalization, social exclusion, shifts in governance, and so forth"* (Fairclough, 2001: 229).

Some practices of critical discourse analysis may have a more detailed concern with linguistic nuances, and thus will seek to isolate the mesolevel - as well as perhaps other intermediary levels – from acutely defined microlevel and macrolevel elements of the discursive process. The concern in this type of analysis is to provide an interpretive 'bridge' between the local cultural values or meanings and the wider social or cultural processes, through the application of appropriate theoretical critiques.

> *"it is through a close and detailed in situ investigation of audiences and popular culture that the overdetermined relationship between totality and everyday life can be described and ultimately theorized"*
>
> (Gibson, 2000: 264)

For the purposes of my thesis therefore, I feel it is sufficient to refer only to the micro and macro levels when, for instance, discussing the interactions between the primary research field (i.e., the cultural responses observed amongst football supporters in Manchester) and the wider structural or environmental world within which the culture operates (i.e., global capitalism). So while my analyses will at times be (linguistically) concerned with the use of particular words and phrases – such as the word *'political'* or the phrase *'love the team: hate the club'*, it is the way in which they are used, interpreted and understood within a relatively broad *microlevel* of the cultural 'habitus' or 'field' (Bourdieu, 1984), that will remain of prime interest, alongside what this may reveal about, or have implications for, the *macrolevel* of wider society and culture.

Social Movement Theory and the Role of the 'Intellectual'

A key aspect of Social Movement theorising to have emerged in recent decades has been a keen interest in the kind of knowledge that is produced in different kinds of social movement organisation, and importantly within this the role played by 'intellectuals' in producing knowledge, particularly when such individuals or groups are immersed or engaged within the movement in question. Such theorising has been particularly prevalent following

landmark events which herald the successes and failures of social and political movements.

These include the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 and its subsequent dissipation into the Soviet state apparatus of the remainder of the 20th Century, the struggles of various western socialist movements amidst the challenges and opportunities brought by major events such as the 1930s Great Depression and the World Wars that sandwiched it, as well as the Cold War which followed. Movements coming out of the developing or majority world, such as in Latin America and Africa have also been of prime interest, as were the insurrections in France in 1968 and later in Eastern Europe, along with campaign-specific movements such as those focusing on identity politics, protecting the environment or anti-war movements.

Much of the debate centres on age-old revolutionary disagreements over the extent to which those who a movement seeks to emancipate - whether referred to as 'the proletariat', 'the working class' or some other constituency defined along cultural or identity lines - might have the agency to achieve whatever are regarded to be meaningful emancipatory goals. Such a debate split the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks as the revolutionary situation of Russia from the turn of the 20th Century opened up the possibilities of workers and peasants taking control of their own means of production, and subsequently the running of the state (see Trotsky, 1967b).

Lenin was of the strong opinion that left to organise themselves, workers could only wage a reformist class struggle via trade unionism and other means to improve their own narrowly-defined lot within the existing system, whereas with the input of wider revolutionary socialist ideas that would for the most part have to come from outside intellectuals, true lasting emancipation could be achieved. The Mensheviks, who Trotsky labelled as 'petty-bourgeois democrats' (1967b: 73), and to some extent Rosa Luxemburg, disagreed with what they saw as Lenin's more prescriptive, centrally-organised approach, favouring instead admittedly more tentative attempts at workers' own self-determination without 'outside' control: *"Historically, the errors committed by a truly revolutionary movement are infinitely more fruitful than the infallibility of the cleverest central committee"* (Rosa Luxemburg, cited in Singer, 2002: 320).

The role of revolutionary intellectual input was important however, according to Lenin and the Bolsheviks, in order to extend the scope of struggle beyond narrow self-interest, by connecting the workers' immediate issues with wider social, economic and political

structures. The ultimate aim then would not just be to win better working conditions or improved pay, but to internationalise or universalise the revolutionary thought, thus facilitating a wider understanding of cause and effect within the workers' consciousness (Singer, 2002). If that thought process could somehow emerge from within the workers without coercion or agitation from outside then no doubt the tactical disagreement between Lenin and Luxemburg wouldn't have been an issue.

Many critics have since traced the deeply authoritarian nightmare of Stalinism back to Lenin's insistence on centralised apparatus, though Singer points out that much of Lenin's writing - especially post-revolution - reveals a deep commitment to power being exerted from below, with workers' councils, or *soviets*, controlling key decision making processes (Singer, 2002: 320). There was clearly a distinction then in Lenin's thought between the ultimate functioning of a truly democratic society and the necessary means of making such a situation possible. In the relatively narrow immediate context of football supporter culture, the potential of an emancipatory consciousness developing from within that culture is a central concern of this thesis, as by extension is the role played by elements traditionally considered to exist primarily outside of English football culture. This would include careful consideration of what effect the knowledge produced from this research output can have on the cause of those being researched.

Gramsci differentiated between *'organic'* and *'traditional'* intellectuals, the former referring to those emerging from within the movements, such as workers, whereas the latter come into the movement from without, working in professions such as academia, the priesthood or law (Gramsci, 1971). Barker and Cox (2002: 1) acknowledge Gramsci in their use of the terms *'movement intellectuals'* and *'academic intellectuals'* to reflect on their own and others' experiences, as both academics and activists. Barker and Cox here follow Nancy Naples in emphasising the contradictions, or at least tensions, inherent in such dual roles which have attempted to *"find a balance between the passion they felt for the community action or activists they were working with and the detachment needed to present their analyses"* (Naples, 1998: 7).

Such tensions are not only apparent to the academic, but are also a potential source of resentment amongst the 'movement intellectuals'. Crossley's (1999) study of organised struggles against the psychiatric profession elucidates the friction different intellectual trajectories can bring to social movements, as noted by Barker and Cox when they talk of the

scepticism movement intellectuals can have for the approach, or *hexis*, of the academic intellectuals which, it is felt, can favour a *"talking shop"* approach rather than more direct or practical action, perhaps reflecting the relative 'comfort zones' of each intellectual approach (Barker and Cox, 2002: 2).

For the academic, attempting to strike that balance referred to by Naples results in a two-pronged concern: how to produce knowledge that is interesting, informative, useful and credible to *both* academia and to the movement. In order to manage both of course, the episteme and ontology on which the researcher's work rests must allow for a paradigm of knowledge being derived *from* and *for* purposeful action. It may always be the case however that, following the old maxim, you may be able to please some of the people all of the time, and all of the people some of the time, but you can't please all of the people all of the time.

As long as the kind of knowledge produced is consistent with the engaged researcher's paradigm that straddles both the movement and academia, then debates over the authenticity of such knowledge production must be referred back to more fundamental questions of episteme and ontology. Whether academic research is best undertaken from a perspective of distance or engagement in the social world, of course remains a contested topic, and given this fact it must be accepted that the nature of the knowledge produced will not receive universal acceptance. This has relevance to fissures and dis-junctures that exist both in academia and the movement concerned.

Generic Propositions and Case Propositions

John Lofland (1996) identified two broad types of useful outcome from studies into social movements. Of most interest to the general field of social movement studies and other related academic subjects are what he terms 'generic propositions' that can be applied across a range of different contexts, in order to determine what works and what doesn't work in attempts to achieve the objectives of social movements. The prime interest taken however by those deeply engaged specifically in particular social movements are what Lofland calls 'case propositions', that identify what worked and didn't work in that specific context, taking into account particular local formations and circumstances (Lofland, 1996).

McAdam et al. (cited in Barker and Cox, 2002: 2) share Lofland's recognition of outcomes that have generic interest for social movement theory when they spoke of *"causal chains consisting of mechanisms that reappear in a wide variety of settings but in different*

sequences and combinations, hence with different collective outcomes". Of course, while academic aims may to a large extent lie in producing knowledge that adds to the field of understanding in a particular discipline, there is also the attendant ultimate aim of the engaged researcher to produce knowledge that has more immediate consequence for the movement in which they research took place.

As Barker and Cox (2002) point out, 'movement intellectuals' may also have a keen interest in both types of knowledge outlined above, but the former 'generic propositions' are ultimately only useful in that they help inform debates over 'what is to be done' in their specific 'case'. This means that for the 'academic intellectual' who claims a stake in the purposeful action potential of social research, generic knowledge must always merely serve as the means through which particular social movements can achieve their particular ends, whether that be the movement in question or others who may benefit from that knowledge in the future.

Adding a note of caution to what may appear initially as mutually useful knowledge production for both social movements and academia, Geoghegan and Cox (2001) recognise that knowledge is always touched by particular 'institutional relationships'. The implications of this are that in attempting to add to 'fields' of knowledge via academic disciplines, whether long established such as sociology or politics, or more contemporary sub-disciplines such as cultural studies or social movement studies, the essence of a movement – its mobility and perhaps unpredictability – can through this generalising process be pared down to something as static as a 'field'. As many social movements seek to encourage a critical scepticism towards established or hegemonic ways of thinking, a reliance on institutionally ingrained knowledge can be debilitating rather than empowering, and therefore serve to subordinate those involved in what is conceived as a *movement* to defer to fixed structures of thinking.

'Cognitive Praxis'

Eyerman and Jamison (1991) characterised social movements as operating necessarily with certain underlying ways of thinking about who they are, what they do and how they do it. It was this reflective consciousness about their organisation that would ultimately inform what they achieve in practice. This 'cognitive praxis' was said to be made up of three main ways of making sense of themselves: the *cosmological*, the *organisational* and the *technological* dimensions (Eyerman and Jamison, 1991). The cosmological was concerned with general

worldviews and what they want to achieve, the organisational with how they are constituted, internal relations and modes of communication as well as how they act, with the technological dimension being concerned with technical expertise and interactions with technology.

Barker and Cox (2002: 10) critique the general utility of the latter *technological* category across the broad range of social movements historically and in the contemporary world, pointing to the difficulties in application to social movements that don't share similar levels of technological focus as the environmental movements cited by Eyerman and Jamison. While I would agree that the technological dimension clearly has less resonance for some social movements than others, as a flexibly-defined framework it can help illuminate some of the organisations involved in the Manchester United supporters' campaigns against football authorities. When the traditionally subservient role played by fans as consumers is concerned, attempts to convince others (as well as themselves) of their expertise or ability in the heady business of football's governance and regulation - that had traditionally been the preserve of either the upper or business classes - the technological dimension may gain some relevance. This could be the case particularly when technically-engaging issues such as supporter safety and crowd control are considered.

Where the issue of supporters actually owning and running their own club is concerned, as with FC United of Manchester, considerations and doubts over whether 'the likes of us' can have the technical acumen or wherewithal to step up to this challenge, perhaps a technological dimension being considered alongside worldview and organisational dynamics can be particularly useful. Furthermore, the philosophical 'cosmological' view of how football should and could be organised that had grown through the development of the social movement, was given expression in the organisational structure of FC United, highlighting Barker and Cox's (2002) point that the reality of social movements involves a more complex convergence of these not-so-separate dimensions of cognitive praxis.

This is certainly something for the immersed, engaged academic to be wary of when considering such models for the evaluation of social movements. The danger of observing something organic and proceeding to categorise it in a *"ahistorical and transcendental"* way, thus packaging it in a form more open to 'traditional intellectual' understanding, which according to Barker and Cox (2002: 10), also risks leading it towards more reformist, rather than revolutionary, influences.

Postmodern Rigour-mortis? Validity, Credibility and Trustworthiness

Many of the perspectives offered in the previous section as justification for my adoption of a critical stance towards the research field, and also towards my role as a researcher, can be traced back to many of the deconstructive movements of postmodernism and its inherent rejection of the highly structured and deterministic paradigms associated with the post-enlightenment 'modern' world of scientific 'progress' (Harvey, 1992; Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

While this has cleared the way for the establishment of more critical and potentially empancipatory perspectives, it has also in some ways presented a disempowering paradox by giving an initial impression that with the end of the great narratives of truth and reason that gave ideological shape to much of the modern world, it is somehow futile to seek out meaningful alternative 'ways of seeing' the world. Postmodern social theorists such as Baudrillard, Derrida and Lyotard have been criticised along these lines for over-emphasising the playfulness and heterogeneity of culture, which some feel effectively strips social life of real meaning.

Teresa Ebert refers to this perspective as 'ludic postmodernism' (cited in Kincheloe and McLaren, 1994), thus highlighting how the objects of its attentions are seen as less than serious, and ultimately incapable of facilitating, let alone initiating, any active movement towards social change. Such a nihilistic outlook was inferred in my earlier criticism of tendencies within academia and elsewhere to quash overtly critical standpoints by labelling them as naïve or simplistic. This stems from the way in which Marxism has been dismissed as a genuine political option or alternative, because history has, according to such sceptics, 'proved that it just doesn't work in reality'. The stress here should be on the word 'alternative', as for many who dismiss Marxism or any other form of 'purposeful action' to effect social transformation, they are not in fact viewing such proposals as an alternative, because they don't believe there is anything political to replace.

The perceived neutrality of the world, even though it is nevertheless recognised that bad things happen from which some derive clear benefits, is then a fundamental focus for my discussions as I feel this lies at the heart of many of the perspectives put forward throughout this research. So even though terms such as 'Marxism' and 'postmodernism' tend to be avoided within much of contemporary academia, I still believe that many of the perspectives drawn from such admittedly theoretical minefields can offer a great deal in our attempts to

understand why people choose certain courses of action, or indeed inaction.

The use of overtly critical theory within research is referred to by Kincheloe and McLaren (1994) as 'resistance postmodernism', an altogether more serious, yet hopeful, incarnation of postmodernism than its 'ludic' counterpart. By recognising that society and culture are still deeply affected by larger systems and processes, even without quite so structuring or determining a framework, such a perspective aims to place people, events and culture in an interdependent world marked by huge imbalances in power, resources, mobility and influence.

This approach, which importantly also recognises the embedded nature of what many still regard as ideally 'neutral' institutions such as the media and academia, naturally sees critical research as being part of a *"materialist intervention"* which should consciously aim to uncover the gritty details behind the world they observe and on which they report (Kincheloe and McLaren, 1994: 144). Such an openly subjective stance creates new problems however for the researcher, in that some of the traditional measures of academic strengths and weaknesses, with their roots in scientific positivism, are in many ways unsuited to this more immersed, postmodern *"critical world making"* (Kincheloe and McLaren, 1994: 154).

It is also pointed out that the use of the term 'validity' may be inappropriate to more critically orientated research, and instead suggest that 'trustworthiness' could be a more apt measure (Kincheloe and McLaren, 1994). As critical researchers have already rejected the possibility of, and therefore also any pretence to, uncovering and recording an incontestable truth or reality, their own fallibility as subjective researchers has been accepted.

This renders traditional notions of 'internal validity' as almost meaningless. Likewise, 'external validity', which seeks to assure us that findings would be consistent across other research fields or groups, could be considered a moot point in the context of critical research, as there tends to be a fundamental rejection of such universal laws within which culture would conform. This does not of course discount or invalidate the importance of professionalism in academic research, as could potentially be inferred through a more 'ludic' reading of postmodern sensibilities.

Issues of trust are therefore seen to be of huge relevance within critical research, as the researcher must at least accept the responsibility to accurately record the project's conditions

and assumptions, thus ensuring that the reader's faith in what is presented as an honest and open account is not misplaced. Ramazanoglu and Holland (2005) emphasise this important point for researchers seeking to challenge previously fixed, common sense 'truths', in that *"(they) still have the problem confronted by all social researchers of making their knowledge believable"* (cited in Woodward, 2008: 554). There is also of course the issue of trust between the researcher and researched, which Kincheloe and McLaren (1994: 151) feel involves so many potential pitfalls and contrasting perspectives that no wholly acceptable 'trustworthiness quotient' is possible.

'Anticipatory accommodation' provides a possible solution for the impotence within critical research of traditional notions of external validity. This approach is thought to be more in line with how people think in everyday situations, by making allowances for various similarities and differences, and at its best for ambivalences, between different contexts. So while some findings from the research are likely to be able to bear close resemblance to research conducted elsewhere and at different times, clearly some will not stand up to the same kind of comparison.

Kincheloe and McLaren put the responsibility of judging the transferable qualities of specific knowledge squarely on the shoulder of the researcher, who ideally would have adequate experience of various different contexts, thus allowing appropriate judgements to be made. John Lofland's (1996) 'generic propositions' for social movements discussed earlier would of course rely on such understandings, on whether findings can be transferred to external contexts, though whether propositions drawn from particular circumstances can be comfortably be accommodated elsewhere, can of course only be 'anticipated' by the researcher.

Keeping more in line with Lofland's 'case propositions' that target particular emancipatory aims of social movements, Patti Lather introduced the idea of 'catalytic validity' which attends to the people under observation, and asks to what extent the research has impacted positively on them. Principally, catalytic validity asks the critical researcher to assess whether their findings can help people to see their world from a different, preferably more enlightened perspective (Kincheloe and McLaren, 1994: 152). I will return to this idea later in the thesis as I consider the possibilities and barriers observed with regard to transformations in cultural and political perspective.

And if, you know, *you're* history…

The telling of stories to describe events must always be thought of as the describing of history from a particular perspective. Quite often, consciously or otherwise, this perspective will be representative of the dominant sensibilities of the time, which may not face much of a challenge from alternative versions, but any account of what happened is always going to be framed to varying degrees by a mix of the personal characteristics, social values, cultural meanings, group affiliations and political agendas of those doing the telling (Street, 2001; Harman, 2008).

Robert Merton delivered an influential account of how sociological retellings of events are tied by the same constraints, so that even with the best of intentions our accounts of what we encountered in the field are always imbued with whatever perspectives we brought to and carried through the research project. In his 1972 work on 'insiders' and 'outsiders' Merton recognised that documented history tends merely to be the version of events as told by those with the means to tell their story, whereas there can be a myriad of different, equally valid perspectives that are excluded from adding their voices to the pages of official history (Stanley, 1993).

In his later analysis of the use of autobiography by sociologists, Merton pointed out the implications this has for our reading of sociological accounts of field research. As Stanley (1993) recognises, this is largely centred on the notion of these accounts as subjective 'texts' which should be interpreted as just that, rather than as neutral 'resources' from which facts are imparted about what happened elsewhere.

For Merton, the utility of an autobiographical account is that it accepts and even relishes the subjective and engaged role of the researcher, while allowing the lens of sociological theory and procedure to be placed over the field in order to *"construct and interpret a narrative text that purports to tell one's own history within the larger history of one's times"* (Stanley, 1993: 43).

This is really what I aim to do here, to include a reflective account of my own 'story within a story', so that the perspective from which any observations are made can be more effectively judged by those taking the time to read this account. So while the initial aim is to provide an interpretation of one cultural domain's reactions to wider, societal transformations, it is recognised that the picture is incomplete without an explanation of how, why and by whom -

within that domain - it was drawn.

Hegemonic Masculinity and Gendered 'inside' Collusion

For the ethnographic researcher, especially those immersed in a sports culture with traditions of masculinity such as football, the contribution of feminist theorising about the way that knowledge is produced and gathered reveals the importance of thorough reflexive practice, so that previously or usually taken-for-granted identity positions within the cultural habitus that may provide privileged or compromised access, can be accounted for. Woodward (2008), in the context of evaluating gendered research within the sport of boxing, points out a tendency to sharply polarise male and female identities as, respectively, insider and outsider positions.

For a woman conducting ethnographic research in the traditionally male reserve of boxing, there would be an almost automatic expectation for explicit reflections on the subjective experience of the female gaining access to a masculine environment. Woodward highlights the scarcity of similarly reflective practice for male researchers immersed in masculine cultures by calling for research work that *"engages with masculinities in a way that makes men visible as men, rather than assuming men as the homogenous, non-gendered norm of humanity"* (Woodward, 2008: 547).

Anthony King's (1997a) work on the 'lads' within Manchester United's independent supporter culture is perhaps indicative of Woodward's observation here, in that while a lot of emphasis is placed on the masculinity that United's 'lads' incorporate in their embodiment of traditional supporter culture, the researcher's gender remains invisible.

While critical of the prominence given to masculinity in the context of King's study (see Chapter 2), the historical role played by masculinity in setting cultural values and parameters in football fandom is not in question. My own acceptance within this cultural domain can not therefore be passed off as simply a result of a long-time status as a Manchester United supporter, which I must accept may not have been so straightforward had I been female.

That said, football *supporter* culture arguably does not carry the same level of masculine exclusivity as the playing side of football, and the differences with boxing are clearly even greater. The inclusion of females within football culture however, remains negotiated and contingent. A 50-50 male-female split in crowd composition would certainly prove

problematic for adherents of traditional football culture, based mainly on the predominantly masculine character of match-day atmosphere, generated to a large extent by communal singing, whether that masculinity be read from the lower tone of male voices or from the content of the songs and chants. The actual, threatened, implied or just potential violence that still exists within the collective identifications of football fandom, particularly in a club's away following, can also not be ignored when considering the role of hegemonic masculinity in supporters' attachments to traditional modes of football fandom.

Within Manchester United's independent supporter movement, the acronym NWAF (No Women At Football) is relatively widely recognised. Though there generally tends to be an ironic, tongue-in-cheek understanding of such sentiments, and so this exclamation would not normally be interpreted to actually be advocating the exclusion of females, this may not always be the case. That such light-hearted use of exclusionary language would not be deemed acceptable if race or ethnicity were the focus is telling of the wider social attitudes towards the exclusion of certain groups.

As discussed in greater detail in Chapters Two and Eight, popular notions of the traditional fan present a problem for those who may seek a simplistic reclamation of tradition in the name of inclusion. The traditional image of the working class man going to the match is a powerful one within football fandom, and often includes romantic ideas of men taking their sons to the game, thereby passing down this tradition through the generations. Similarly, attitudes towards the playing of the game are shot through with masculinised ideals of strength, athleticism and aggressions. Balancing ingrained powerful ideas of authenticity and tradition alongside those of inclusion must therefore take a relatively nuanced grasp of the reality of hegemonic masculinity.

Women do write regular articles in fanzines and also hold prominent positions within independent campaign groups, as well as on the board and staff of FC United of Manchester. Men however still retain numerical dominance within all of these organisations, and perhaps unsurprisingly the gender of female personnel tends to be a primary point of recognition amongst the mainly male membership or stakeholders in these organisations, whereas this is not the case with men, whose gender tends to be less visible. For a researcher in this cultural habitus therefore, gender is certainly a factor to be acknowledged, whether in focusing on the barriers to acceptance for females, or the lack of gender barriers for male researchers.

Auto-ethnography

> *"Stemming from the field of anthropology, autoethnography shares the storytelling feature with other genres of self-narrative but transcends mere narration of self to engage in cultural analysis and interpretation"*
>
> (Chang, 2008: 43)

Merging the personal, introspective approach of autobiographical accounts with ethnographic studies of cultures, autoethnography grasps wholeheartedly the subjective nature of social science's role in interpreting the cultural meanings and values that exist in the interactions between the individual and society. The connection therefore of 'the social' to 'the self', and vice versa, is the fundamental tenet of autoethnography (Reed-Danahay, 1997).

Owing much of its impetus and early influence to feminist academic traditions, which did so much to both acknowledge and embrace the links between the personal, the social and the political (Stanley, 1993), autoethnography brings great advantages to sociological research, though these depend very much on reflexively grasping those most fundamental understandings of episteme and ontology. Being able to use one's own experience to help make sense of a particular cultural world requires tapping into an often deliberately overlooked source of information.

Carolyn Ellis (1999) claims that by taking the time to better understand your own experience, you can better understand others around you. Sharing similar ground to Geertz's recognition of the 'here' and 'there' in ethnographic research, Ellis goes on to explain;

> *"Back and forth autoethnographers gaze, first through an ethnographic wide angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then, they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations… These texts… (appear as) relational and institutional stories impacted by history and social structure, which themselves are dialectically revealed through actions, feelings, thoughts, and language"*
>
> (Ellis, 1999: 673)

In acknowledging the subjective researcher in sociological research, our own historical and social situated-ness is reflected, allowing us to *"study the social world from the perspective of the interacting individual"* (Denzin, 1989: xv) and thus *"(in) autoethnographic methods, the researcher is the epistemological and ontological nexus upon which the research process*

turns" (Spry, 2001: 711). Being able to draw upon my own experience therefore, as an engaged, immersed participant in the cultural world under investigation, has been pivotal in developing my own understanding of what was happening, and crucially as a researcher in being able to understand others' understandings, and thus working towards making sense of my own cultural world as it is impacted by wider structural forces.

Of course, such a research method has its critics. Aside from paradigmatically more objective critics who bemoan the move away from more positivist approaches, such as those who point to *"the postmodern obsession with self-reflexivity and with ethnographer subjectivity"* which it is felt *"stalls the progress of anthropology"* (Chang, 2008: 45), there is recognition of certain weaknesses or limitations in aspects of autoethnographic method even amongst its proponents. While some researchers, such as Ellis, Denzin and Spry – all quoted above, favour a particularly subjective autoethnography which can involve creative use of unusual (for social science) writing styles and even 'evocative' performance such as poetry or theatre, others such as Atkinson (2006) would err more towards a more traditionally analytical and theoretical autoethnography.

Chang highlights some of the rigours insisted upon in some of the more objectively-oriented autoethnography traditions, such as through the work of Anderson (2006) who outlines five benchmarks for what he calls 'analytic autoethnography': The autoethnographer must be a *"complete member in the social world under study"*, must reflexively analyse his or her own contribution, should be visible and active in written accounts, be sure to include other social actors' experiences and observations, and must theoretically analyse the findings (cited in Chang, 2008: 46).

In the chapters that follow, I draw upon this auto-ethnographic tradition to reflect upon my own participant observation experiences and thus attempt to interpret the cultural values and meanings as I understand them. Crucially, the same is also attempted for the autobiographical accounts of fellow social actors in the research field, which themselves also veer into auto-ethnographic interpretations. Where my understandings and interpretations differ is in my role as academic researcher, in that it is my responsibility to meet the final of Anderson's conditions, that of undertaking theoretical analysis.

Writing-up as a method of 'knowing'

The process of 'writing-up' research findings and analyses should not merely be thought of as

a final rounding up of pre-existing thoughts and conclusions. Indeed, it has been during the process of writing-up that much of the thinking expressed in this thesis was developed, and conclusions drawn. Accordingly, Laurel Richardson (1994: 516) advises that researchers should see writing as *"a method of enquiry, a way of finding out about yourself and your topic...a way of "knowing""*.

This phenomena was expressed particularly well by Sondra Perl, as she reflected on the writing up process in 1983: *"We see in our words a further structuring of the sense we began with...we end up with a product that teaches us something...and that lifts out or explicates or enlarges our experiences"* (cited in Meloy, 1993: 315).

This has certainly been the case throughout this research, partially in writing up field notes immediately following certain key 'events' - which on reflection formed a crucial part of the process of cultural-political transformation described elsewhere in relation to Marx and Engels' notion of the *'muck of ages'* (Barker, 1995), but also more fully in the later process of 'writing-up' the thesis. Indeed, it was during the latter that a more critically reflexive sense of the implications of being both academic researcher and active participant was developed.

> *"Paradoxically, we know more and doubt what we know"*
> (Richardson, 1994: 522)

The manner and style in which research findings and analyses are presented therefore became of central importance, as it was through this process that I was also able to focus sufficiently on the potential overlaps and clashes between different 'kinds' of readers or audience. While establishing academic credibility must remain of prime concern, it is a key objective for this to be achieved while being careful not to exclude those whose views, values and experiences the research seeks to represent.

Part of this involves a conscious aim to avoid writing either in an aloof, overly structured or scientific academic style, or in a manner which could be perceived as being in the tradition of intellectual vanguards of social change. Such a perception should be separated from the explicit aims already laid out for this research to be part of the knowledge-gathering and sense-making that can help empower the culture being researched. The role of the so-called intellectual vanguard has been critiqued within contemporary studies of social movements (Holloway, 2002; Graeber, 2004; Hardt and Negri, 2006), in that even with the best of

intentions, and with the recognition of the importance of intellectual input, it is not uncommon for the result to ultimately be one of disempowerment rather than anything emancipatory (Shukaitis and Graeber, 2007: 12).

Such an outcome would clearly fail to meet Lather's criteria of *'catalytic validity'* (Kincheloe and McLaren, 1994: 152) discussed earlier this chapter, which critically assesses the contribution of academic work to the causes at the heart of its study, rather than to a 'disembodied' field of knowledge. It would be all well and good for the engaged, immersed researcher to experience the transformative effects of that deep cultural-political engagement, but if the research is to be considered valid from Lather's catalytic perspective, surely increasing the facility for such benefits to be shared must be a prime objective.

The writing-up of the research findings therefore have to play a central role within this ambition, which must aim to convey as true a sense as possible of the lived experience of the culture under scrutiny. In line with these concerns, and linked to post-structuralist sensibilities which see language as a site of discovery and also of struggle, Richardson points to the importance of the researcher maintaining a strong sense of self when writing, which has the effect of making the work *"more honest, more engaged"* (Richardson, 1994: 516).

Doxa

For the purposes of maintaining this deep, immersed perspective and avoiding appearing too analytically prescriptive, it was decided that it was important for the 'voice' of the participants in the research field to be heard when events and cultural-political discourse are analysed. The inclusion in Chapter 9 of autobiographical accounts, written by supporters of their own perspective on their 'journey', alongside my own autobiographical and auto-ethnographic accounts as participant-researcher, is a way of including this voice.

> *"one struggles to express one's own voice in the midst of an enquiry designed to capture the participants' experience and represent their voices, all the while attempting to create a research text that will speak to, and reflect upon, the audience's voices"*
> (Clandinin and Connelly, 1994: 423)

Such an approach, it is hoped, can provide a small way for other participants to reflect on their own 'journey', or *'shaping walk'* (Brady, 2006) and perhaps to convey more directly the how common sense ways of thinking about the world are being reflected upon, and possibly contested, within this particular cultural domain. It is through such struggles that, following

Gramsci, there lies the potential for counter-hegemonic thinking to be developed, such as that for football supporters to cast off the deferential blind-loyalty that is recognised here as a key factor in preventing meaningful resistance to perceivably negative transformations.

Zygmunt Bauman has described the contemporary sensibilities of the 'liquid' modern, politically dis-engaged individual as akin to would-be passengers standing on the platform of a train station, passively watching the truly mobile get on with bringing their version of the world to their stationary selves. The important thing in this metaphor is that the would-be passenger, while perhaps frustrated at their lack of mobility, still *knows*, in the common sense way captured in Bourdieu's (1984) use of the term 'doxa' - the knowledge we think with, but not about (Blackshaw, 2005) - that this station is where they belong, and the moving train is for a different kind of person;

I bet there's rich folks eating in a fancy dining car
they're probably drinkin' coffee and smoking big cigars.
Well I know I had it coming, I know I can't be free
but those people keep a movin'
and that's what tortures me...
(from 'Folsom Prison Blues' by Johnny Cash)

When Cash reflects that he knows he *'had it coming'* and concludes that he *'can't be free'*, he is of course taking on the perspective of a prisoner, which is perhaps apt if it is agreed the power of *ideological* apparatus can be more effective than that of more overtly *repressive* apparatus (Althusser, 1971). The consent that facilitates ideological submissiveness has of course been at the heart of established critical theorising on this topic since Gramsci wrote (from prison) in the 1930s of the difficulties inevitably faced by those seeking to create a counter-hegemony (Gramsci, 1971). The perspective of 'it's not for the likes of us' to take an active role in political developments was also captured astutely by Robert Tressell as long ago as 1910 in his enduringly important book *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (Tressell, 1993).

The ways that the critical perspectives of Bauman and Gramsci see power as being internalised within everyday discourse bear many similarities to the theories of Nietzsche and also Foucault on the workings of power and how knowledge is certified. By breaking free of previously dominant ways of thinking about our place in the world, such as those instances occurring around local struggles described by the likes of Fantasia (1988), Barker

(1995), Klandermans (1996) and Naples (1998), it is possible for participants in such struggles to create wider social as well as 'institutional' memory, which can resist those elements of ideology that might otherwise constrain a desire for self-direction (Barker 1996 & 2001).

Supporter Discourse: Matches, Marches, Pubs, Fanzines and Keyboards

According to Geertz, ethnography is ultimately about recording how the participants interpret *"what they and their compatriots are up to"* (cited in Gibson, 2000: 265). Analysis of the discourse produced by supporters on the cultural and political issues at the heart of this thesis has been of great benefit in attempts to interpret how Mancunian football supporter culture has reacted in different ways to, and has therefore understood, what is 'going on' around them.

Much of this discourse exists as a result of supporters' desire and attempts to create independent spaces for communication on issues of which they are most concerned. The emergence of print fanzines in the 1980s (see Redhead, 1991 and Haynes, 1995) and the subsequent partial 'migration' of independent fan discourse to the online 'e-zine' has served to provide a wealth of ready-to-analyse data for the qualitative researcher with an interest in football supporter culture (Millward, 2008).

Nash (2000) claims that fanzines in general represent a democratic environment in which fans can express their views, and a more explicit *"political dimension"* of the fanzine movement as identified by Haynes (1995), is also noted by Johnstone (cited in Millward, 2008: 302), in that through this independent media supporters were able to engage in politicised debate on issues such as club ownership and the governance of the sport. It is a contention of this thesis that partly as a result of engagement with this independently produced media, supporters have been able to develop a more critical view of their own role and status, beyond traditionally defined boundaries ideologically rendered by strong notions of loyalty and authenticity.

I would also argue that the move towards the more widely accessible digital versions of fanzines, which have increasingly taken the form of online live message boards, while representing a step forward in the potential for democratic participation (Boyle and Haynes, 2004: 141), have not necessarily facilitated a similar politicisation of supporter sensibilities as recognised in the more exclusively-populated domain of 1990s independent supporter

organisation, via print fanzines and campaign groups.

Boyle and Haynes do suggest that more individually administered football ‘blogs’ may open up new potential for critical discourse, which raises interesting questions over the dynamics of online production, consumption and interaction. Central to this may be questions as to the role of the 'expert' in media production, mirroring debates that have taken place concerning the music industry and more generally, as well as more overtly politically, the reporting and dissemination of news stories in the wake of proliferating 'interactive' media (see Dean, 2009).

The exploration of data within print fanzine or online fan culture, is characterised by Millward (2008), following Christine Hine (2000), as *'virtual ethnography'*. Unlike many other ethnographic approaches, virtual ethnography has the advantage of being relatively unobtrusive, which Millward recognises as fitting within the *“ideal methods”* criteria set out by Webb et al. in their 1966 treatise on social science research methods (cited in Millward, 2008: 307).

The soliciting and inclusion of personal narratives or auto-biographical accounts is rather more intrusive, as the researcher has actively encouraged the subject to reflect upon and put in their own (written) words a story which will form part of a subsequently assembled wider narrative, as determined by the researcher. While the strengths of such an approach lie in the empowering and legitimising potential of including the subjective 'voice' of the subject, alongside that of the researcher, the correspondingly subjective process of assembling that narrative must also be recognised and laid bare.

In the forward to a 1986 re-print of his seminal exploration of the 'Hard Times' experienced by 1930s depression-era Americans, Studs Terkel describes his collection of personal, biographical oral histories as *“a memory book”* before adding that *“(in) their rememberings are their truths”* (Terkel, 1986: 3). In humbly applying such a perspective to the biographical stories told of supporters' 'journey to FC United' in Chapter 9, I aim to present their truths alongside my own interpretations, to provide a subjectively rooted yet truthful history of the cultural and political journeys supporters made in choosing to resist rather than comply with the direction in which their culture was being taken.

Following the tradition of *symbolic interactionism*, Howard Becker favoured a method of

"close-up" sociological research, building on the work of previous Chicago School thinkers such as George Herbert Mead (Smith, 1994). The role of (auto)biographical accounts was therefore, according to Becker and his contemporaries in the 1960s and 70s, one that sociology should embrace. Such accounts might be thought of as 'touchstones', forming part of an investigative 'mosaic' in which the experience and role of people within larger social structures are placed (Smith, 1994: 298).

More recently, Norman Denzin (1989) has argued the case for utilising 'interpretive biography' in sociological research, in which the subjective role of the writer – whether that may be the participant, the researcher, or both – is acknowledged and championed. As previously detailed, these then-radical perspectives on the positioning of the researcher have become much more widely accepted in recent years (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994).

Clandinin and Connelly (1994) make a distinction between what they term 'story' and 'narrative', in that for them 'story' should refer to the phenomenon itself, whereas 'narrative' should be used to describe the inquiry into what happened. People in reality therefore *"...lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives, whereas narrative researchers describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them, and write narratives of experience"* (Clandinin and Connelly, 1994: 416).

Addressing once again positivist concerns about objective truths and subjective interpretation, Sylvia Molloy claims that while autobiography is indeed an interpretive construct, this should be regarded in the context of re-presenting the already existing narratives of how we understand our life, which according to Molloy *" ...is always, necessarily, a tale"* (cited in Clandinin and Connelly, 1994: 421).

Whereas journals or diaries may excel in capturing the day-to-day fragments of life experience, autobiographical writing encourages the drawing together of such fragments into a more coherent whole, even if the narrative of that whole is applied retrospectively. This more reflexive method of making sense of the world the writer has observed or experienced, is after all what is expected of the qualitative researcher, and therefore to deny similar agency to research subjects would be to de-legitimise their voice. That the researcher maintains the privilege of constructing a broader narrative in 'writing-up' the findings or thesis, ensures at once a check on overly ambitious claims to such methods as democratising, while guarding against the more ludic approaches to post-modern or post-structural research.

Nostalgic Representation

There is a danger, when writing about local cultures under perceived threat from global systems, of indulging in, or allowing oneself to become swept away by, the nostalgic imagining of an authentic past that is seen to stand in noble juxtaposition to the threat of an inauthentic future. This was a pattern recognised by Newton and Stacey in a critique of many anthropological studies of post-colonial cultures, which are accused of often presenting a nostalgic 'salvage text' which *"portrays the native culture as a coherent, authentic, and lamentably "evading past""* while presumably an inauthentic future prevails (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2004: 153).

This concern points to the difficulties of trying to strike a balance between modernist depictions of fixed, essentialist cultures, that might be otherwise frozen were it not for the advances of inauthentic outside influences, and 'ludic' postmodernist portrayals of always contingent cultural signifiers, in which meanings are transformed at the whim of a pluralistic authorship and readership. Neither approach can achieve what an engaged, critical researcher sets out to do, which is to produce work that can in some way help to challenge perceived imbalances in power. A deliberate move away from the oppressive former must surely not necessitate a naïve rush towards the empty latter.

James Clifford (1992: 102) argued along similar lines when he claimed that 'writing culture' should reflect the *"transnational political, economic and cultural forces that traverse and constitute local or regional worlds"*. It is possible therefore to research 'threatened' cultures and focus on the agency that exists within, as often neglected by 'postmodernists' such as Baudrillard, while at the same time recognising the wider reality of the dominant structures and systems that 'cultural populists' such as Fiske are accused of overlooking. So while the exploited cultural dupe and the ironic, knowing post-consumer must both be recognised in cultural research, the domain of this simultaneously exploited and enjoyed culture must also, and I would say more importantly, be scrutinised for those examples of more politically and culturally driven elements of meaningful resistance.

Too pure for politics?

Similarly, within traditional English football supporter culture there is held a 'common sense' attitude that says that football, including the way the supporters view the relationship they have with their club, should be thought of as outside of other areas of life, especially

what many see as the suspicious and foul world of 'politics' (Hargreaves, 1992). So football, being such a central thread in many fans' lives, is routinely held up by fans as being too important or too 'pure' to be sullied by mixing it up with the ugliness of 'real life'. This I feel represents the backdrop to possibly the most important issue to arise from this research, in that the new 'politicised' perspective adopted by some fans throws new, and not always very well appreciated, light upon the avowedly apolitical tradition of English football and suggests that for some fans at least, a more engaged and arguably more enlightened perspective is emerging.

Largely as a result of my simultaneous engagement over recent years both within Manchester's independent football culture and through the process of reading, observing, analysing and writing for my PhD within academia, my perspective has developed a more critical, reflective character. I would now view actors within either field as less discrete than I would have done previously, and would add that those attempts to operate from a neutral, disengaged position with regards to 'the outside world' actually serve to disempower both football supporters and academic researchers.

By 'getting our hands dirty' therefore, through engaging with wider 'politics' and culture and developing a deeper understanding of how we operate interdependently as part of a social and political world that is certainly not value neutral, we can help to ensure that we are not mere pawns in a game that can be seen by some as too big, ingrained and even 'natural' for "the likes of us" to understand or actively influence.

Crucially, taking this more engaged approach may well ensure that the environment in which we do what we do is a more vibrant and fertile one, and that what we produce is not there to serve the interests of those who see these supposedly neutral and everyday elements of culture or education as mere means to their own financial ends. I believe that educators and researchers would like to think that the knowledge and understanding they produce and impart has value in itself and is not there merely to serve business interests (Giroux, 1988; Osterweill and Chesters, 2007), and I know that football fans like to believe that their cultural values, rituals, songs, activities and discourse have genuine creative value in themselves and should not be commodified or passively consumed (Conn, 1997; King, 1998).

Ironically, within this belief amongst football fans that their culture should remain untouched

by the corporate world, we can also see the values that help embed them within it. We will see in later chapters that while fans will passionately oppose the game's commodification on grounds of cultural value, they do so because they have a strong sense of their culture as naturally occurring and therefore they see it as more 'authentic' than the commercially-constituted, fabricated incarnations of 'new fan' culture.

For many fans however, a perspective that sees their cultural practices being cheapened by football's commercialisation, carries with it a strong defensive mechanism that can also render any overtly 'political' attempts to resist the game's corporatisation equally, or perhaps in some senses, more threatening to their values. This is highlighted particularly clearly within analyses in later chapters of supporter discourse surrounding these issues, not least in the contested use of the word 'politics' itself.

So although many fans oppose the corporatisation of their supporter culture, they seek to define their opposition in neutral, non-political terms. Their culture then is cherished as being too important to be tainted by either the corporate or political worlds. The perspective of this thesis however, both in terms of research methodology and cultural engagement, is that mounting any defence against corporate encroachment *is* political. Just as political however, are the implications of an acceptance that such neo-liberal processes are natural or inevitable.

Recognising the pervasive nature of political thought or action requires a certain amount of counter-intuitive thinking, such is the success of the dominant hegemonic characterisation of 'politics' as resistance, rebellion, opposing the status quo. Attempts to establish a successful counter-hegemony which recognises that to maintain the status quo is also to support a political position is, as Gramsci feared, a historically difficult task.

The corporatisation of education, as well as culture, is not part of some naturally-occurring phenomena outside of politics or ideology (Eden, 2007), so by disempowering ourselves through taking a neutral approach to either we are allowing ourselves to be taken along with the flow and certainly not, as some believe, left to sit proudly on the sidelines of somebody else's grubby game.

Once the researcher has accepted his or her subjective role in the world under observation, it appears futile and dishonest to maintain the pretence of merely holding up a mirror to the

world, so as Kincheloe and McLaren (1994) suggest, we should accept *"the transgressive task of posing the research itself as a set of ideological practices"* (ibid: 144). To do this, any researcher that holds, in the words of Habermas, an *"emancipatory knowledge interest"* (see Fairclough, 2001: 230) must add his or her own voice to the many others attempting to interpret and define the events they experience and observe.

Such a discussion around notions of neutrality and objectivity can not pass without reference to almost identical debates around the media. Like academia, much of the modern media – particularly 'news' media such as the journalistic output of newspapers, television and radio – bears a traditionally held 'common sense' imperative to present 'facts' without bias.

When discussing issues of mass media bias, John Street (2001) claims that *"...the extent to which 'bias' matters is a consequence of a set of underlying political assumptions"* (ibid: 16). Going on to explain that bias necessarily *"entails a critical judgement"*, Street argues that *"(if) being biased is to prefer one side in a dispute, or to favour one interpretation or to sympathize with one cause, it does not follow automatically that this is wrong"* (ibid: 17).

Amongst the range of theoretical problems connected with ideas of neutrality, Street observes that it is impossible to record all of the 'facts', so that those recording and reporting things must make choices as to which 'facts' are more relevant, which is done through what Holli Semetko regards as the often contradictory application of notions of 'objectivity' and 'balance' (Street, 2001). Whereas balance would require a consciously equal weighting given to competing arguments or ideas, objectivity necessitates a value judgement of what is and what isn't relevant. Within the news industry, any deliberations over the application of objectivity and/or balance is surmounted, according to Semetko, through adherence to whatever *"journalistic culture"* one operates within (Street, 2001: 19).

This in itself implies that 'cultural' preferences are influencing our perspectives on the supposed black-and-white realities of 'bias' and 'neutrality'. Like journalism then, academia's traditional obsession with either avoiding or seeking these respective polar opposites in an attempt to present 'the facts', can itself be regarded as having been filtered through whatever prevailing 'academic culture' that researchers necessarily operate within. There is no reason however to view this as an attempt to sully the achievements of academic research, indeed quite the opposite is true.

The underlying assumption within all attempts to adhere to standards of objectivity and neutrality in reporting on events and issues, whether in academia or the news media, is that the public should be given the opportunity to make their own minds up while finding out about the world, free of any mediated distortions (Street, 2001). The problem with such a laudable aim is that it has created a dominant way of thinking, or in Gramscian terms a hegemonic ideology, that has imbued those seen as ‘neutral’ with the most noble and pure virtues, while viewing those who openly take sides with suspicion and hostility.

As Gramsci emphatically argued, perhaps the greatest achievement of the powerful structures in society (i.e., capitalism) has been to present those ideas, arguments and perspectives which support the upkeep of its power as being neutral, thus creating a ‘common sense’ ideology (Gramsci, 1971) which, as a first line of defence, automatically serves to banish opposing or resistive ideas to the margins of society, casting them as sinister attempts to thwart the 'natural' order of things.

Those that espouse such oppositional views are characterised of course as being ‘biased’, working to an ‘agenda’ and in the case of more persistent voices of dissent, they can often be mocked as a ‘missionary’ or in extreme cases dismissed as a ‘fundamentalist’, such as characterised in Benjamin Barber's text 'Jihad vs. McWorld' (Merrett, 2001). We will see when analysing the reactions of football supporters when faced with ideas and perspectives that go against their familiar grain, that the defensive reactions of some, often aggressively so, has been to characterise those holding such 'radical' views along these lines.

I will present such cultural and political contestations alongside appropriate theoretical frameworks, which as well as those already outlined here will include the notion of ‘ressentiment’, though understood along the lines set out by Jean-Paul Sartre’s concept of ‘bad faith’. This is particularly pertinent when those seeking to challenge an oppressive status quo are met with derision and hostility by their peers, a symptom perhaps of living through what Kierkegaard regarded as a ‘reflective age’ of stifling sentiment and inaction (Poole and Stangerup, 1989).

Resistance to, or fear of, politicised outlooks is clearly an interesting phenomenon. The idea that we should ‘leave our politics at the door’ like a dirty pair of shoes, when we enter into certain social situations is a bizarre notion, but one that nevertheless deserves careful attention on account of its seemingly widespread application.

Academia has certainly not been immune to such 'common sense' thinking, particularly as its obsession with objectivity and neutrality remained largely unchallenged for so long. With the establishment of more subjective and openly committed approaches to research this obviously waned, but there does still seem to be some reluctance within academia to appear in any way 'biased'.

Students tend to expect a detached delivery in their lectures, with some ready to make official complaints if a professor dares to take sides in issues of a political nature. Again, this appears to stem from the 'common sense' view that knowledge can, and therefore should, be delivered in pristine, untouched condition. So like the sombre newsreader, university lecturers can feel pressured to suppress whatever partisan positions they may hold dear. With a consciously critical research agenda however, a perspective is adopted which sees the resultant work as *"a transformative endeavour unembarrassed by the label 'political' and unafraid to consummate a relationship with an emancipatory consciousness"* (Kincheloe and McLaren, 1994: 140).

Ultimately then, perhaps the most consistent theme to emerge from this thesis is that politics can not be separated from culture, society and indeed life, and that all of these elements are interdependent, with none so privileged as to keep totally clean hands. So as an academic and as a part of the cultural life observed, my understanding is that in order to prove a positive influence on our own world and those interdependent worlds around us, it is vital to take perspectives and actions that are influenced by wider considered principles rather than isolated dogmatic norms, however much it might bring us into conflict with the traditional gatekeepers of authentic practice or image (Denzin and Lincoln, 2004).

CHAPTER 5

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

This chapter outlines the particular methods employed to gather empirical data, and importantly therefore reveals how the epistemological considerations reflected upon in the previous chapter, actually played out when applied in the research field. The chapter begins by providing a brief 'research overview' of methods and sources.

In the spirit of critical reflection, the chapter also serves in part as an autobiographical account (Stanley, 1992; Smith, 1994) of my role both as participant (supporter / campaigner / protester) and as academic researcher. Providing a direct link to the empirical context, a number of key field accounts are provided, following the tradition of *auto-ethnography* (Ellis, 1999; Spry, 2001; Bre, 2007) in an attempt to portray what Clifford Geertz' (1979) termed *'thick descriptions'* of events in the research field. Attempts are therefore made, in light of the key objectives of this thesis, to make sense of what Janice Radway, following Geertz, recognised as the *"informal logic of everyday life"* (Radway, 1986: 100).

It is hoped this will provide for both reader and writer a clearer understanding of my own 'journey', as a social actor and as an academic. Although such an autobiographical account is not a widely-utilised methodological tool, such approaches are becoming more mainstream in the social sciences (Chang, 2008), and I am certain that telling the story of the researcher's experience can be of benefit for both the writer and also other researchers who may be at an early stage in their academic careers (Bre, 2007).

Research Overview

The qualitative research upon which this thesis is based consists of a combination of participant observation, interviews and discourse analysis which, together with supporting literature from previous studies and influential theory, have provided the insights via which findings are presented and conclusions drawn.

Observations were drawn from participation in supporter meetings and protests, as well as through attendance at football matches. Interviews were carried out with representatives of

institutions and organisations at the heart of events described, and the discourse through which actors in the research field made sense of actions, events, situations and their place within them, is analysed with the theoretical and conceptual focus of the thesis in mind.

RESEARCH SOURCES

Listed below are the specific sources utilised, along with dates of events, meetings and interviews. Sources are grouped broadly under three titles: Observations, Discourse Analysis and Interviews.

Observations

Many more events and activities were attended during the course of the research that were of accumulative significance, but below are some key events at which particularly significant observations were made, most of which are directly cited in the thesis...

- Matches;
  - 24/10/04: Manchester United v Arsenal (Old Trafford, Manchester)
  - 23/02/05: Manchester United v AC Milan (Old Trafford, Manchester)
  - 21/05/05: Arsenal v Manchester United (FA Cup Final, Cardiff)
  - 03/10/06: Salford City v FC United of Manchester (The Willows, Salford)
  - 29/12/07: FC United of Manchester Reserves v Club A.Z. (Abbey Hey, Manchester)

- Protests;
  - 24/10/04: Pre-match protest march and 'flashmob' (Old Trafford, Manchester)
  - 12/02/05: 'Flashmob' protest targeting club sponsors (Manchester City Centre)
  - 23/02/05: Pre-match protest march (Old Trafford, Manchester)
  - 12/05/05: Protest on the day takeover announced (Old Trafford, Manchester)
  - 18/06/05: Protest at UEFA Executive meeting (City of Manchester Stadium, Manchester)
  - 29/06/05: Protest at Glazers' visit to Old Trafford (Manchester)
  - 08/04/06: Protest targeting Ladbrokes on Grand National Day (Manchester City Centre)
  - 10/10/09: Anti-fascist protest against the English Defence League (Manchester City Centre)

- Meetings;
  - 14/10/04: IMUSA meeting (O'Briens, Stretford, Manchester)
  - 19/05/05: Public Meeting following takeover (Methodist Hall, Manchester)
  - 30/05/05: Public Meeting (Apollo Theatre, Ardwick, Manchester)
  - 05/07/05: FC United Inaugural Meeting (Methodist Hall, Manchester)
  - 07/09/05: IMUSA EGM (O'Briens, Stretford, Manchester)
  - 05/03/06: Bluewatch/AAG meeting (Bradford Inn, Beswick, Manchester)
  - 14/09/06: IMUSA meeting (Trafford Hall Hotel, Manchester)
  - 25/02/07: Manchester City Supporters' Trust meeting (UMIST, Manchester)

Discourse Analysis

- Fanzines;
  - MUFC: 'Red Issue', 'United We Stand'
  - MCFC: 'City Till I Cry', 'King of the Kippax'
  - FCUM: 'Under The Boardwalk', 'A Fine Lung'

- Online Discussions (various news websites and supporter discussion boards)

- Supporter Autobiographical Narratives (FCUM supporters' accounts of 'journey to FC')

- Online Questionnaire (883 responses, August/September 2005)

- Official Publications: Manchester United FC, Manchester City FC, FC United of Manchester, Manchester City Council, Marketing Manchester, Independent Manchester United Supporters Association (IMUSA), Manchester United Supporters Trust (MUST).

Interviews

- Independent supporter organisations;
  - 03/11/05: Phill Gatenby, Manchester City Supporters Association. ex-fanzine editor
  - 05/12/05: Simon Cooper, Bluewatch, formerly Atmosphere Action Group
  - 05/12/07: Duncan Drasdo, Manchester United Supporters Trust
  - 14/12/07: Mark Longden, Independent Manchester United Supporters Association

- Football Clubs;
  - 20/12/04: Phil Townsend (Director of Communications, MUFC)
  - 12/01/05: Ian Howard (Marketing & Communications Manager, MCFC)
  - 25/06/11: Jules Spencer (Board Member, FCUM and former Chair, IMUSA)

- City Organisations;
  - 06/01/05: Sheldon Philips (Partnership Marketing Manager, NWDA)
  - 25/01/05: Susan Hunt (Director of Marketing Co-ordination, Manchester City Council)
  - 26/01/05: Mark Hackett (Executive Member for Culture & Leisure, Manchester City Council)
  - 26/09/05: Paul Simpson (Deputy Chief Executive, Marketing Manchester)

Background: Selecting the Research Topic and Field

Selecting the topic itself must be acknowledged as a significantly subjective stage in the research process. Initially, the research field was conceived with a relatively broadly focus upon the dynamics of cultural discourse among supporters of Manchester United and Manchester City, and in particular on notions of belonging to, or ownership of, the city.

The choice of Manchester as research field was therefore taken for relatively uncomplicated

reasons. It was clear from a prior and existing engagement in this field that the football culture of Manchester was sufficiently rich and varied, particularly with regard to the broad issues of local identity, cultural capital and globalisation, which from the outset were the key conceptual areas of interest.

Regular attendance of Manchester United matches at home, away and abroad, together with a keen involvement in the club's independent fan culture - as long-term member of independent fan representative and campaign bodies *Independent Manchester United Supporters Association (IMUSA)* and *Shareholders United (SU)*, and also as reader and occasional contributor to two independent, supporter-run fanzines *United We Stand* and *Red Issue* - had provided me with valuable insights into the fan culture and discourse that underpinned the issues that the research sought to examine.

From the late 1980s when I started regularly travelling to away games, I became increasingly fascinated with football supporter culture. By the mid-1990s, this engagement was firmly within the independent realms of supporter culture at Manchester United, though as far as fanzines and independent campaign groups went, I remained more of a consumer than active participant. An understanding, or at least an uncultivated observation, that the culture created by the fans was far more intense, rich and 'authentic' than that carried via mainstream outlets and media, was really what intrigued me most during this time, though I had not yet discovered the means to adequately analyse or articulate this rather raw outlook.

I was intrigued by my awareness that the fanzines were providing creative and intellectual sustenance at this time, delivering acerbic, critical comment on the issues and 'scene' that I was witnessing first hand. The articles within the two fanzines I regularly read, and occasionally contributed to during this time – Red Issue and United We Stand – were capturing the zeitgeist of what I was seeing and feeling within football culture at United, in Manchester and in the UK more generally. It wasn't until much later that I had any thoughts of being able to merge my engagement in football culture with academic research.

University had never been a seriously considered option, perhaps because none of my friends or family had been through Higher Education. Such reasoning is identified by Diane Reay (2005) as an example of class-based reproduction of socialised norms, and certainly while at school a university education was never encouraged or suggested as an option (see also Willis, 1977). In my early twenties however I began to socialise with a new circle of

friends. This put me in close contact with people for whom there had been an expectation that they go to university, amongst both friends and families and in themselves.

This new habitus, following Bourdieu's (1984) conception of how class-based cultural tastes and values provide common-sense ways of thinking, led me to re-evaluate my own aspirations. I had been working in a warehouse for four years, doing a job from which I had become increasingly disenchanted for some time, albeit previously without any real direction or inspiration with which to imagine an attractive and realistic alternative. To the scepticism of my family, I quit this job and enrolled on a part-time 'Open College' course. A year later, I moved away to university to begin a three-year degree, with the concerns of my parents now seemingly put aside.

My final year at university, 1998-1999, coincided with my first active involvement with supporter campaigning, via the Independent Manchester United Supporters Association (IMUSA). This followed the announcement of Rupert Murdoch's intention to buy the club through his satellite broadcasting company BSkyB (see Brown and Walsh, 1999). Having been a relatively passive member of IMUSA since its inception three years earlier, I now took on a more active interest, though my involvement at this stage didn't move beyond attending meetings and writing letters to MPs, imploring them to investigate and intervene.

This involvement highlighted for me the importance of independently organised fan groups and media, though it wouldn't be until a number of years later that my deeper engagement in this more politicised aspect of supporter culture would fundamentally alter the direction of not only my support of Manchester United, but also my academic career, as well as my political perspective more generally. In 2001, following broken periods of temporary work and a spell of independent travel, I enrolled on a taught Masters course in Sociology at Manchester Metropolitan University.

I had been made aware of the research interests of Dr Adam Brown, based within the Manchester Institute for Popular Culture (MIPC) at Manchester Metropolitan University, as a result of an interview printed in the United We Stand fanzine - an unusual example of how engagement with independent fan culture helped to direct me towards academia. I was also aware of the active roles he had within various supporter campaign groups, particularly IMUSA, throughout the 1990's, culminating in that group's relatively high profile role in the campaign which led to the failure of Murdoch's bid to buy the club.

Dr Brown agreed to supervise my Master's thesis which was focused on football supporter culture, looking specifically at how both historical factors and contemporary aspects of local identity and globalisation are bound up in the rivalry between the supporters of Manchester United and Liverpool football clubs. One year after completing my Masters degree, I was successful in applying for a PhD Studentship via MIPC in which I proposed to further investigate issues of local identity, globalisation and football culture in Manchester.

My prior immersion in the independent football culture of Manchester United therefore was very influential in directing me towards this research field, and continues to be a valuable source of knowledge and understanding. During the research for this thesis, it was certainly my involvement as *both* supporter *and* researcher that led - along with the unfolding of actual events in the field - to a change of focus from one that looked purely at contestations of cultural values and meanings around local identity and authenticity, to one that prioritised more politically-charged issues and sensibilities.

Initial Research Focus

At the outset, the research field was broadly understood as the cultural *habitus* of the supporters of Manchester United and Manchester City football clubs. From a local-global interaction perspective, I was specifically concerned with *'what the football clubs do to the city, and what the city does to the football clubs'*. The research subjects were therefore to be the locally-, regionally-, nationally- and globally-based supporters of both clubs, and those whose work helped to shape the terrain of supporter culture, such as club officials and employees, along with various other stakeholders in Manchester's image-building strategies.

Initially, willing contacts were established within various supporter representative groups (independent campaign organisations, fanzines, official 'branches' and web-based newsletters and networks of fans of both clubs). Alongside this I was of course reading academically, mainly on the subjects of globalisation, cultural studies and football-specific literature. I also continued to attend Manchester United matches, as well as meetings of IMUSA.

Throughout this time, reflection on the eventual direction and focus of the research continued. A strong engagement within football supporter culture, and in the topics I was reading and teaching, helped me to see that there was clearly something very interesting

happening within football culture that was related to globalisation. Manchester certainly provided a readily observable case study for football and globalisation, given the public profiles of its two professional clubs, and I was aware of what significance this had in terms of ‘cultural capital’ and authenticity for the clubs’ fans.

I could see that there would be mileage in gauging the perspectives of fans locally and globally on the ‘Manchester’ element of their clubs, and in examining the active direction both clubs were taking in terms of marketing and corporate policy perspectives that were related to issues of local identity and global image. As a means to capture the former, a qualitative online questionnaire was devised and circulated amongst various communities of Manchester City and Manchester United supporters. Over 800 fans completed the survey, mainly commenting on the importance of ‘Manchester’ to their support for the club.

While this data did not ultimately prove to be of direct empirical utility for the development of the thesis, issues of local identity would retain relevance throughout the course of the research, while other avenues initially explored, such as interviews with representatives of Manchester City Council, Marketing Manchester and the North West Development Agency, focusing on the image building strategies of the city, would become of more peripheral interest.

Moving in from the margins however, as a result of my immersion in both academia and within independent football supporter culture, was a more politicised perspective on the processes and transformations unfolding in Manchester. This would manifest itself most acutely during the summer of 2005 as supporters fought against Malcolm Glazer's takeover of Manchester United. The resulting changes in perspective, as both a football supporter and as an academic, are described elsewhere as a 'political turn'.

Home Advantage

Despite attempts to remain in touch with the supporter culture of Manchester City, I was always aware that I could never really balance my levels of ‘immersion’ in the fan cultures of the two clubs due to my lifelong attachment to Manchester United. This was important as I not only felt Manchester City would provide an interesting counter-position and ‘complete the picture’ of Mancunian football culture, but also that it would enhance the credibility of the research by widening its scope beyond just studying 'my own' club.

Even after the events of 2005, when the research focus shifted, or perhaps more accurately 'sharpened', to investigate in more detail matters of fan democracy and cultural/political empowerment, I still felt using a wide enough lens to include what was happening within Manchester City's fan culture remained appropriate. I was partially uneasy about this due to what appeared to be a clear contrast between the two clubs' respective supporter cultures in this regard, as I had observed relatively little in terms of critical supporter movements within Manchester City's fan culture, and I was keen for my research not to be seen as merely a cultural critique of Manchester City supporters. To the benefit of the overall vitality of the research, I feel that this concern did lead to a more consciously critical stance when assessing Manchester United fan reactions to the observed events.

Eventually I was to decide that, for reasons of methodological consistency, the prime focus of the thesis should be on the Manchester United fan culture that I was so familiar with and had such an organic relationship to. I have already discussed what I feel are the benefits of being so immersed in the research field, and naturally my observations of Manchester City fan culture could only ever be as an outside observer. Nevertheless, it is still possible to present a 'thick description' (Geertz, 1979) of observations made, and as a way of *"joining ethnography to both biography and lived experience"* (Vidich and Lyman, 1994: 41), also engaging in the equally important process of 'thick interpretation' (Denzin, 1989), which may occur partially 'there' in the field and partially 'here' in the writing-up process (Spry, 2001).

Field Account: Manchester City Fans' Meeting

One incident that highlights the differences in research position I had to adopt when studying the two clubs' fans was when I attended a meeting of Manchester City fans in 2006 to discuss plans for a protest about what their organisation - Bluewatch - saw as a lack of atmosphere at home games (see also Penny and Redhead, 2009). The meeting took place on a Sunday morning in a pub in Beswick, East Manchester, tellingly just before a televised Premier League early kick-off against Sunderland at the nearby City of Manchester Stadium.

Manchester City Supporters' meeting – Bluewatch/AAG, 5th March 2006

I had contacted the main organiser of the meeting via another contact within the Manchester City independent supporter movement, who was also loosely involved with Bluewatch (a group that had previously

referred to themselves as the City Supporters' Union), a mainly web-based organisation that sought to tackle issues concerning atmosphere, ticket prices and other match-going supporter issues common to such independent groups. My two contacts were also key figures in long-standing campaign groups such as Atmosphere Action Group (AAG) and Stand Up-Sit Down (SUSD) as well as various independent fanzines. My contact had invited me to come to an (unspecified) upcoming meeting some weeks previously, so when I was sent details of the meeting (after joining their mailing list) I decided to go along.

The bus which took me to the meeting place was one that travels past Manchester City's stadium, and so I found myself sat amongst a number of City fans making their way to the game. Most were wearing replica shirts and various other City colours, and some had small radios with them which are becoming a rarer sight at football grounds in an age of digital and mobile communications.

Making perhaps unfair assumptions from their dress and demeanour, I guessed that they were not the type of fan to arrive early for a pre-match pint, or indeed to attend a fans' campaign meeting, but were instead most likely to get to the ground early, perhaps to visit the club shop or just sit in their seat reading the programme. Even with a match re-scheduled for Sunday at noon, it seemed some fans would resist breaking their pre-match habits and rituals.

I got off a bus along with the majority of Manchester City-supporting passengers outside the stadium, and by that time I had mentally prepared myself for a semi-covert research operation. I obviously wore no team colours, which I'd avoided for many years even at United games, and was psyching myself up for entering the pub which I was aware had been linked with some of City's more notorious 'hooligan' fans. This wasn't a derby game, and as far as I was aware there was no history of animosity between City and Sunderland fans, so there was little call for

too much wariness in entering a ‘City pub’ on match day.

The reason I was slightly concerned was that I was about to go to a meeting which was likely to be more exclusively attended than the pub would be on a 'normal' match day, and therefore my covert role would perhaps be more difficult to maintain. I was particularly worried that if the turnout was small, my presence would likely be more noticeable. Without a large crowd to blend in with, there was more chance of being addressed directly and maybe even asked for an opinion, which would require deeper levels of deception than I felt comfortable with.

I decided therefore that it was important to arrive early so that I could make my presence known to my contact, and preferably maintain my anonymity in everyone else’s eyes. I considered what effect my being introduced as a researcher would have, even by the meeting organiser, and thought it would likely be negative. My contact also knew I was a Manchester United supporter, and knowing football fans it would be very unlikely that he wouldn’t cheekily also announce this fact ‘as an aside’, and knowing City fans particularly, many would be unlikely to take to this as casually as he had seemed to.

Still, it would be better to tell him I was there, not that I felt there was very much chance of being ‘outed’ as a United fan, as an intruder or as a spy of some sort, as the invitation had after all urged as many newcomers as possible to come along, so they were hardly likely to interrogate me over my presence there. My concern however, was that if I attended the meeting covertly and later introduced myself in person to my contact, I would risk eroding whatever level of trust there was between us if he saw my lack of initial introduction as some kind of deception.

This partially-overt approach would obviously risk altering what was said during the meeting, but I was more concerned at this stage with

maintaining a good level of trust than gaining any juicy titbits that might have only been available had I decided to remain covert.

So, after considering all these different scenarios on the walk from the stadium to the pub, I had just about mentally prepared myself as the low-profile, casual, ordinary football fan – after all I wasn't prepared to regard myself even temporarily as a typical-looking Manchester City fan…we all have our limits.

As I approached the front entrance of the pub, which was flanked by two menacing looking, burly doormen eyeing me up contemptuously, I heard my first name being shouted in an excitable female voice. I ignored it as I thought surely the calls must be meant for someone else, or at least I hoped so. The shouting of my name continued as I crossed the road, only in a louder more insistent tone.

I reluctantly turned around, and was greeted by the sight of my Auntie Norma stood outside the pub, hamburger in hand, next to her new husband Paul, both wrapped up in City scarves and hats. Never in all the years I have known my Auntie Norma had she remotely expressed any interest in football, let alone in attending a match, so when she shouted "What are you doin' ere…you're not a City fan are you?", it was difficult not to return the query.

After recalling that Paul was in fact a City fan things made a bit more sense, though I was still a little taken aback to see her in such unfamiliar surroundings. I quietly explained that I was still certainly not a City fan, and was there for my university research, which proved sufficient explanation to pacify their curiosity. This distraction served not only to shake me from my paranoid preparations for undercover research, but also to make me a few minutes late for the meeting.

As I feared, when I found the room in the pub that was holding the

meeting, it was already under way, which meant it was too late for me to introduce myself to my contact and thus avoid the discomfort of covertly observing the meeting. Scanning the room, I reassured myself that there was no one else that would recognise me, and ordered a drink from the bar. It was a fairly small turnout, only about 12 people, and they were huddled around a couple of tables on the far side of the room. This would make my approach more self-consciously uncomfortable, and would probably require some sort of introduction.

I thought I might be able to get away with a few nods to some of them, and perhaps a quick 'alright mate' to someone around my age so the group would presume I was more familiar than was the case. There was always the risk though that everyone would stop talking when I approached, and that would be the point when – to avoid misleading my contact – I would have to introduce myself to him, in front of everyone else. Another problem was that I didn't know what he looked like, having only spoken to him on the phone during a brief interview.

Once I'd got my drink I cowardly sat down at a table a few feet away from the group, just close enough so that I could hear what was being said but just far enough away and out of the line of sight of most, to not look like I was trying to listen. I was hoping for a break in the meeting or for a chance to talk to the man who looked like he was in charge, maybe when he went to the bar or the toilet, though the latter would potentially lead to new levels of deliberations over social etiquette.

No such chances came along, so I sat there for an hour nursing two halves of bitter, and doing what people tend to do nowadays when sat on their own wishing to project that this lonesome state is only temporary: I fiddled with my mobile phone, so maybe people would think I was waiting for someone. After a while, I remembered that my phone had a recording capability, and contemplated recording what was being said, but a quick ethical consideration led me to think better of it.

This ‘bystander’ perspective did however allow me to make a few observations that I may not have done had I actually been sat within the immediate meeting space. Most of my observations were made by mentally referring to the context of similar meetings of Manchester United supporters, so issues of relativity are fairly limited to the context of Mancunian football culture.

This was a relatively small gathering of around a dozen fans of different ages, fairly evenly spread from a young man of around twenty years of age, through to a man perhaps in his early fifties. There were two women in attendance, both I’d say were in their late twenties or early thirties. Most were wearing club colours, a few with replica City shirts, most with hats and scarves (though removed during the meeting) and I was able to observe one or two small pin badges on the men in their twenties and thirties.

The picture tended to be slightly different at independent fan meetings of Manchester United supporters, in which club colours were relatively rare apart from small pin badges. This could be seen as being fairly reflective of different sensibilities within each cultural domain, which I discuss elsewhere in assessing the development of independent fan culture at Manchester United over the decades immediately preceding this research. Generally speaking, for reasons of perceived authenticity, a strong anti-commercial sentiment had prospered within United’s independent fan culture, and it was from within this ‘habitus’ that groups such as IMUSA had been created.

A big similarity however, between United and City fan meetings, was that the majority of opinion and comment came from a select few individuals, who from their references appeared to have attended numerous other meetings and had a detailed background knowledge of the group’s workings and history. Various ‘in-jokes’ and personal comments helped to

(presumably unintentionally) maintain a somewhat cliquey atmosphere as the meeting wore on.

The subject of the meeting was a planned protest inside the stadium during an upcoming televised home game, with the aim of drawing attention to the issue of fans being prevented from standing up at games. Fans spoke of their disillusionment with the atmosphere at the new stadium, of heavy-handed stewarding and of newer, less vocal fans. Throughout the meeting, there were remarkable similarities observed between this and those held by Manchester United over the previous decade and more, although my recent experience of the tension-filled takeover saga and events since, were putting a new inflection on how I observed the issues raised and suggestions made for tackling them.

The main empirical impact of observations made during field research such as this are discussed in later chapters, but I feel this experience in itself illuminates in the research process some important areas for reflection. Chief among these, as previously suggested, is that my position from which observations were made is vastly different when observing Manchester City supporters than with Manchester United supporters, for perhaps obvious cultural reasons.

It was vital that I retained throughout an awareness of the effect of my engaged position in Manchester United's supporter culture, on not only how I viewed that culture but also how it may influence my views on Manchester City's supporter culture. It is quite natural that new experiences, such as those surrounding the anti-takeover campaign and the ensuing cultural transformations and socio-political implications which form a central plank of this thesis, will provide new context and perspective from which to observe other, related activities and issues. I was very conscious therefore not to make unfair value judgements of one set of fans over another.

My familiarity and confidence was much greater when attending Manchester United supporters' meetings, even though I was never really one to readily make my opinions known, particularly in larger gatherings. As a researcher at such meetings therefore, I found I

could fit in quite seamlessly and naturally without any of the mental preparation and tactical angst I had put myself through before attending the Manchester City fans' meeting.

This was mainly because when attending similar Manchester United 'events' I did not have to worry about trying to fit in with everybody else, as I was genuinely there as a United supporter. Whereas when attending Manchester City supporter meetings – while sharing a broad sympathy and understanding of how those same issues are affecting them – I was still an outsider looking in. I couldn't temporarily become a City fan even if I had wanted to. Giulianotti recognised these kind of difficulties when relating the problems he faced when attempting to win the trust of groups of supporters outside his own cultural habitus (Giulianotti, 1995).

I think these points are important for me as a researcher to contemplate, and are the reason why the observations made while attending such Manchester City 'events' have to be assessed in a different context to those made at Manchester United supporter meetings. A broad discussion of the field of Mancunian football culture still necessitates the inclusion of the events, discourse, activities etc. of Manchester City supporters, and indeed my overall research findings would be much weaker without being able to refer to and evaluate the context of Manchester City fans.

If I am to claim, however, that the methodological strength of my research lies in my immersed, engaged perspective as a Manchester United supporter, actually living through and genuinely experiencing the events and their effects, then this claim can't be extended to include information garnered while outside of that familiar, cultural world. Some level of familiarity does of course extend to football culture more generally, particularly in Manchester, but to a much lesser degree than that experienced with Manchester United supporters.

So while I can confidently refer to and analyse related issues and debates based on information gathered outside of 'my own' immediate cultural world, and may even utilise this to add more substance throughout, it must be made clear from the outset that only while analysing the Manchester United context can this 'unique' perspective be invoked. It was for this reason therefore that Manchester City were, in effect, relegated from the primary research focus - in order to maintain methodological and epistemological consistency.

At this point I should clarify two issues that have been inadvertently raised;

Firstly, that when I refer above to my research perspective as being ‘unique’, it is merely meant as an acknowledgement that my position as participant observer will provide a different perspective to one that would be offered by another participant observer in the same field (Clandinin and Connelly, 1994). I can’t claim to ‘speak for’ any other Manchester United supporters, only to offer my own interpretation of the field, and my analyses of others’ reactions within it.

Secondly, when I talk of maintaining research consistency, I don’t intend to suggest that in research there is any need to claim a position or method and rigidly ‘stick to it’. To the contrary, I would advocate what may be bracketed as a ‘postmodern’ use of multiple conceptual approaches (Guba and Lincoln, 1994) and therefore research methods to avoid being constrained by the kind of dogmatic leash that many recent critical theorists have inspiringly sought to slip. What I instead refer to is the researcher’s responsibility to acknowledge and make clear to the reader where such fractures from the central thread of perspective may appear. Of course, this supposes that we can always recognise such departures, overlaps or contradictions, but it is important that, at the very least, researchers make the effort to look for them.

Immersed in the Field

Producing an account of my experience in the research field presents a few issues which differentiates it from the majority of participant observation experiences. The biggest issue to be considered is that there is no time at which I can accurately describe ‘entering the field’ or ‘leaving the field’, as I was already in it when the research started and I expect to remain there long after this thesis is written.

While this ‘as you were’ situation necessitates facing up to a number of issues concerned with objectivity and perspective, it does render less problematic a few barriers that are common to participant observation research in general. Most such exercises require problems of acceptance, unfamiliarity and culture clashes to be overcome, but in this case those issues had largely been ironed out over the many previous years spent engaged in the supporter culture of Manchester United.

So as a participant I was, in Geertz' terms, already ‘there’, largely without the social and

cultural obstacles Giulianotti (1995) describes having to negotiate when seeking *entrée* to football supporter cultures alien to his own social and cultural world. While different kinds of hurdles were to present themselves following the cultural upheavals brought about by the events described around the 2005 takeover, I was more or less able to negotiate these collectively with other inhabitants of this cultural world, an experience which undoubtedly resulted in a more 'embedded' position than before. As an academic observer however, as previously discussed, I would initially be positioned rather uncomfortably as issues of neutrality and contaminating the field were reflected on, until I eventually reconciled such concerns by accepting the validity of and ultimately embracing a more critical, engaged perspective.

Field Account: Manchester United Match-day Protest

Perhaps the best way to tease out these issues is to present instances of how my dual roles as participant and researcher got on while in the field. The first such account is a field report written, with the aid of brief field notes, shortly after participating in a protest march and attempted 'flashmob' of the Manchester United 'megastore' before a Manchester United v Arsenal match at Old Trafford in October 2004.

Manchester United supporters' Protest, Old Trafford, 24th October 2004

In the Autumn of 2004 it was becoming clear that Malcolm Glazer was about to launch a takeover bid for Manchester United, and the first large-scale response by those fans opposed to such a transaction was a protest march before a televised match against Arsenal on Sunday 24th October. I had been made aware of the plans via leaflets given out at previous games, as well as via emails I had signed up to receive from IMUSA and Shareholders United (SU).

Tellingly, I left my group of match-going friends in the pub which had long ago been adopted as our habitual meeting point for a pre-match drink. Despite expressing interest in my regular updates on all matters concerning fan democracy and takeover talk, none of them had ever accompanied me to any supporter meetings or joined any of the independent supporter organisations. They occasionally bought fanzines, though usually just read mine, and had provided positive encouragement

on the occasions that I submitted an article or letter for publication.

Their reaction to an invitation to join me in taking part in the protest march seemed to be made up of a mixture of apathy, bemusement and some discomfort at being 'put on the spot'. It wasn't so much that they disagreed with the aims of the march, or even necessarily that they thought it would be 'a waste of time' – although that was surely contributory – but that they seemed slightly embarrassed by the prospect of being in a 'protest march'. Whether that was down to impressions they had formed from media portrayals of such events and those involved, or that they didn't want to actively support a cause that they hadn't given enough thought to, is difficult to judge fairly.

I joined the march at its outset outside the Old Trafford cricket ground, which proceeded to march slowly towards the football ground while chanting 'United, United, Not For Sale' and various longer-established United songs. Many fans had home-made banners proclaiming their opposition to the club being bought, while others held up more generic Manchester United banners and flags. The front of the march was marked by a professionally made banner proclaiming "NOT FOR $AL£", with a Manchester United club crest replacing the 'O' in 'FOR'.

The march had been organised with the permission of Greater Manchester Police, and a number of police officers, accompanied by dogs and video cameras, escorted the march as it moved towards the football ground. The march 'picked up' more participants as it went along, and when it reached the forecourt outside the ground, the majority stayed there while continuing the chants, flag-waving and banner-holding.

I was also aware, via meetings and conversations, of a plan to 'flashmob' the main club shop, the 'Megastore', with the plan being to enter the shop as would-be customers, only to 'occupy' the store for as long as possible, thus preventing anybody else from entering and spending

money. The rationale was based around the 'No Customers, No Profits' slogan, with an aim that potential buyers of the club might be dissuaded if protesting fans could reduce profits through their non-cooperation and direct opposition.

I was excited by this idea, and made my way to the section of the crowd nearest to the shop entrance, which by this time had been closed and was guarded by police and security guards. I thought that the police must either have received word of this plan or that perhaps it was a standard response in such a situation, to protect any potential targets. Suddenly, a number of fans started to prise open the doors with their fingers, while the security guards inside and the police outside desperately tried to keep the fans out. This was indeed an irony, Manchester United employing security guards and police to keep fans out of their club shop!

Within seconds though, the doors were opened and the mass of bodies, including me, excitedly flooded in to the shop. Many had brought umbrellas in an attempt to evade the gaze of security cameras, while others wore hats, scarves wrapped around faces or even balaclavas. I zipped up my coat, pulled on my hood and wrapped my scarf around my nose and mouth. I had brought the scarf specially for this purpose, so had already decided on a preference of avoiding being ‘caught on camera’, even if beforehand I hadn’t anticipated the fans’ having to force their way in.

Only days before, I had been inside Old Trafford as an invited guest, interviewing Manchester United’s Director of Communications on issues of local identity and globalisation. This very different route of entry into the stadium - rushing past the flailing arms of security guards rather than signing in the visitor book – certainly enhanced my wish to avoid being identified, especially as I was in the process of trying to arrange a follow-up interview with the club’s Marketing Director.

The fans inside the club shop were surprisingly restrained, with only one or two disturbing the shop displays by throwing random items away from their set positions, in an attempt to cause further inconvenience in the club's pursuit of the fans' money. The singing of course continued, and within the confines of the store such chants resounded particularly vehemently, providing a cacophony of independent, anti-corporate supporter sentiment. Unlike some of the more popular chants heard inside the ground, we could be confident that these lyrics wouldn't be finding their way on to any future official club merchandise to be sold within this space, no matter how much it might be - as has been the case with other supporter-produced songs - censored by the club for consumption by a family audience.

After maybe just ten minutes, this 'occupation' was ended when a line of riot police entered the shop and proceeded to force the fans towards the exit. There was little in the way of resistance to this movement, as fans pragmatically put their own physical safety, and their desire to avoid arrest, before the cause they were campaigning for by moving slowly towards the exit.

I was no exception to this, and exited the store quite pleased that we had made our point, although slightly disappointed at being out-manoeuvred by the police, as a much longer occupation would have been more effective. That said, it was conceived as a 'flashmob', which suggests an almost theatrical or carnivalesque quality, usually underpinned by humour or novelty rather than explicitly political goals.

There was certainly a political will behind this action though, which for me, coupled with the novelty and excitement of active involvement in such 'civil disobedience', gave me a feeling of intense engagement, a real adrenaline rush of both fear and excitement.

Once back outside the stadium, a slowly dwindling number of fans continued their protests, though by now the groundswell of protesting fans, including me, were congregating about thirty yards adjacent to the entrance of the club 'Megastore'. Not long after the unwelcome intruders had been evicted, a well-organised police operation was ensuring only genuine customers were admitted to the store. I watched with some bemusement as the queues of eager shoppers continued to form at the single doorway now re-opened, with most seemingly oblivious to the disturbance that had gone before.

As kick-off approached, the size of the protesting crowd began to shrink quite rapidly. For most, the takeover campaign was an important issue but there was no way their protest was going to prevent them from watching the match. The fixture against Arsenal was a big game for United fans, who wanted to see their team put a stop to a long unbeaten run by the visitors, who were threatening to dominate the league just as United had over the previous decade or so.

I was determined to stay until the end of the protest, and was caught between twin fears of missing something, either on the pitch or outside the ground. A small band of fans continued their protests, the chants becoming more defiant as the numbers singing them shrunk. The position these last remaining fans took - by kick off only in the hundreds as opposed to the thousands on the main march - was causing a slight delay for some fans in reaching their turnstiles, and now that the crowd of protesters had voluntarily reduced in numbers the police began their attempts at dispersal.

Police on horseback instructed supporters to go into the ground, while those officers on foot individually tried to persuade fans to move, in some cases by force. I was manhandled twice by police officers as I attempted to stand my ground, becoming fairly indignant that just possessing a match ticket surely should not carry some kind of legal requirement to

use it! At one point I looked at my watch and realised that the game had been underway for fifteen minutes, and felt at once minor anxiety at missing the game, yet was also enthralled with how I felt being outside.

I had been late for games before, usually away games, when transport problems had held me up, or when I'd been stuck in a queue as the game kicked off, but this was different. There were also numerous occasions when I had been outside away grounds without a ticket, and missed parts or the whole of games, but again it was never through choice.

I was now however *choosing* to stay outside the ground during a match which I had a ticket for. I saw this as an act of defiance, an act that showed, to me at least, that I was willing to forego immediate individual fulfilment in an attempt to protect the long term health of the club. I was no martyr, as what I was missing out on was being provided instead by something different, more active and meaningful, even if I hadn't yet worked out completely what this meaning was.

I felt close to the people stood around me as the undulating crowd noise from inside Old Trafford carried over the stands, while police attempts to force us into the ground became increasingly forceful. The following summer I'd be outside Old Trafford again as crowd noise swept over the stands, only it would be 'piped', recorded crowd noise, played as some kind of perverse welcome to the Glazer family, and the police that night would be trying to get the fans as far away from the stadium as possible to ensure a safe passage out for the Glazers.

Back in October 2004, standing outside Old Trafford while an important game was taking place inside, I couldn't have imagined what was to happen over the coming months, and how differently I'd eventually come to view my football club. I looked around and recognised a few faces from away matches and supporter meetings, and one from the row in

front of mine at home games who I'd later see regularly at FC United matches. I didn't know any of them to talk to, just the occasional nod of recognition.

Eventually the numbers remaining got so low that there were more police than protesters, and as I looked around again it resembled the remnants of a party, with just a handful of revellers left standing, all desperately trying to stay awake and not 'give in' to the mundane inevitability of sleep. We all knew that staying there was futile, that nothing more could be achieved without getting arrested, now that the safety and empowerment of numbers was gone, but for me at least, I didn't want to be part of the reason for the protest ending, to actively hasten its demise.

The third time I was physically manhandled by police, it was by two of them, and there was simply no crowd left to hide amongst had I been able to give them the slip. I was still angry at the thought of having my liberty compromised while part of a largely peaceful, yet passionate, protest. I was slightly anxious about getting arrested if I resisted too forcefully, so decided to keep quiet and head into the ground.

I only missed half an hour or so of the game, and no goals, so it may not appear too significant, but this was a pivotal day in my relationship with Manchester United Football Club[7]. The match itself was tense and the relatively raucous atmosphere generated by the fans was certainly due in no small part to the protesting fans becoming so 'pumped up' before going in to the game. The late victory secured by the team added to this sense of excitement, and as I walked home the feeling of euphoria was as intense as that experienced following any game I could recall.

The differences between this account and that of the Manchester City supporters' meeting are

[7] The significance of this day would ultimately be felt beyond merely my match-going sensibilities, in that it would prove a turning point for my outlook politically, culturally and as an academic.

stark, not only in the content of 'what went on' but also crucially in my own engagement as researcher. In these Manchester United supporters' protests, I was genuinely participating as I simultaneously observed, and fully shared the concerns and much of the cultural habitus of fellow participants.

The extent to which the academic significance of the events may have been consciously present while in the field is extremely difficult to gauge, and ultimately it is only the researcher's own sense of reflexive awareness that is capable of effectively judging this. While such concerns should perhaps remain a healthy point of reflection in qualitative research, I follow the post-positivist view that they should not be indulged to the extent that the researcher is debilitated through daunting levels of psychological and philosophical introspection. Once the immersed, critical spirit of auto-ethnography is embraced, the interminable nature of attempts to separate a disengaged intellectual self from a 'real' self becomes clearer, so that as Geertz observed "*It is not a question of going native...(it) is a question of living a multiplex life; sailing at once in several seas"* (cited in Spry, 2001: 726).

The significance of the above account lies in the fact that the protest was taking place outside the football ground, and away from the pages of fanzines and internet message boards. That the protest was immediately outside the football ground, and continued while the match was under way inside the ground, was equally significant. This was, at least for me, the first time when I had sacrificed my direct match-attending relationship with Manchester United in order to pursue what I was increasingly coming to see as the more important goal of protecting the long-term health of the club.

This more politically engaged viewpoint was to lead to participation in a number of future protests both around Manchester United match-days and also away from that immediate physical context, which are reported in later chapters.

Eight months later, with the club sold and the campaign to prevent Glazer's takeover defeated, the fans who had invested so much time and energy in opposing the takeover were to have some difficult decisions to make. Would they continue their resistance against the club's new owners, with a fight from within or from without, or might they just give up on the dream of Manchester United becoming a supporter-owned club? These kind of decisions were also being mulled over by me as I struggled to come to terms with the changing perspective from which I was now viewing my relationship with the club.

Field Account: Defeat, Solidarity, Resignation

The final auto-ethnographic field account of this chapter highlights some of the personal and cultural revelations that influenced the change in perspective both as a participant in the cultural habitus of Manchester United football fandom, and as a researcher observing the tumultuous cultural contestations involved. The development of a more critical, politicised paradigm would prove influential in how I developed within both.

Defeat, Solidarity, Resignation: FA Cup Final, Cardiff. 21st May 2005

This was the first match I attended since the takeover by Glazer was announced nine days earlier. It was also to be the last and only match I would attend under Glazer's ownership, but a firm decision to boycott Manchester United matches was still some way off being made as I made my way to Cardiff in a mini-bus, accompanied as usual by my match-going friends of many years.

Their reactions to my attendance at supporter meetings and protests was always in many ways positive, but the over-riding feeling I got was that they were indifferent to the concerns I had over ownership and fan democracy. Their commitment to the club as supporters was just as strong as mine, but they had never engaged with the independent elements of Manchester United supporter culture in the same way as I had, not that I had always been as active in that respect as I could have. My engagement had grown steadily over the years however, with my participation in the anti-Glazer takeover campaign being most intense. Myself and two friends in particular had travelled all over the UK and throughout Europe together, watching our team rise from early- and mid-1980s under-achievement to become the most successful English team of the last twenty years.

On this day, the 'Not For Sale' coalition had urged Manchester United

supporters to wear all black at the match as a symbolic gesture[8], reflecting our deep collective sense of despair at the Glazer takeover. For many, this was to be an apt funereal display in response to what they saw as the loss of their football club. I had put together as dark-coloured an outfit as I could muster and was determined to play my part in this symbolic display. My friends taunted me that my jumper was more grey than black, showing they said, that I was obviously not fully committed to the cause. Though pointed out in jest, I did chastise myself at the lazy compromise I had made.

Only three days earlier, I had attended a meeting in Manchester city centre at which supporters spoke passionately on the issue of boycotting matches, and of mounting a spectacular protest against the new owners at the Cup Final. The most prominent idea touted involved the staging of a pitch invasion to get the match called off. The negative publicity that such a stunt would no doubt generate at such a prestigious and traditional event, plus the impact on opposition fans who would be innocent victims of the action, led to the idea being talked down. Another idea, which wasn't overtly discouraged but was not to materialise, was for protesting fans to meet Sky television presenter Tim Lovejoy – who had publicised that he would be travelling with the match ball by helicopter from London to Cardiff – at the landing ground close to the stadium, and throw him and the ball in the river...

As reflected upon in more detail in Chapter 5, I had come away from that meeting still unsure about the course of action I would take following the takeover. Today, as it would turn out, was going to be the day that, more than any other, would convince me of what I needed to do. Before the game, there was a pre-advertised plan for all protesting fans to meet outside the Prince of Wales pub, five minutes' walk away from the Millennium Stadium where the game was to be played.

[8] See Appendix 3.

Our group was in a pub a few minutes away from there, and during the hours leading up to the designated meeting time we discussed the merits of my suggestion that I would give up my season ticket in protest at the takeover. I reasoned that I felt strongly that the club would become run in a more corporate and commercial way, and that the supporter culture we had all grown up with would be destroyed. “That's already happening, has been for twenty years” was one observation, along with “I don't know what all the fuss is about. We hated Edwards and now we're a PLC we're up for sale. Why should you let Glazer keep you away from United?”

One friend offered the opinion that while there were a lot of United fans talking about boycotting games, there “won't be too many that are giving up as much as you”, and suggested that most calling for a boycott probably didn't even have season tickets. He mentioned the fact that I was in the so-called 'loyalty pot', a small group of fans who apply for every away ticket, and by doing so over many years become part of an exclusive group who supposedly enjoy preference when away tickets are allocated. Almost all Manchester United away games had been heavily over-subscribed for many years, so many fans, like me and my friends, had got into the habit of applying for every game even if we weren't certain we could go, such was the fear of dropping out of this 'loyalty pot'. This fear of giving up a 'privileged' position built up over many years had certainly been a factor over previous weeks that at times of uncertainty had tipped my deliberations more towards keeping my season ticket than giving it up.

I had one heart-to-heart conversation with one of my closest friends, during which we talked about the idea of another club being set up by United fans. I said it would be a way of preserving the match culture that had been gradually squeezed out at Old Trafford for many years, and was now becoming even rarer at away games. My friend offered the view that “it just wouldn't be the same though, would it?”. I could only reply “of course it wouldn't, but neither will United in a few years”. I explained that

when I used to look around the stands at United games, I felt everyone shared the same love of the club and cared about the same things. That was why goals and victories were so passionately celebrated, and why the atmosphere was always so much greater at away games than at Old Trafford, because there were more passionate fans all standing (not sitting) together. When I hugged strangers, fell over seats and rolled down aisles during the more raucous goal celebrations, it was because I felt close to the other United fans. “I don't feel that as often anymore” I sighed, “and it's becoming rarer and rarer. I can't just shrug and accept that will disappear from United”.

I was feeling quite emotional, and I realised he could see that as he had stopped trying to convince me that I was taking the wrong decision. I then noticed it was past the time I wanted to leave to meet the others in the protest, and asked one more time if anyone was coming with me. The reaction was more of an awkward silence than an outright no, along with an almost uniform gesture towards their nearly full pint glasses.

When I arrived at the Prince of Wales pub, there wasn't much sign of a protest. I saw someone I knew from the campaign, who told me that the police had moved on a group of fans who were staging a sit-down protest in the road and preventing traffic from getting past. A similar protest had taken place on the roads outside Old Trafford on the evening the takeover was announced, and frustrated fans were obviously seeking to cause any kind of disruption that might draw attention to the campaign. I scanned around the throngs of United fans who were variously walking, standing, sitting, drinking and singing all around me. There were a lot of fans dressed in United colours, wearing replica shirts, scarves, hats and waving flags. There were some dressed in black as per the planned protest, but most seemed to be either unaware of or untroubled by the planned protest.

Some were kicking, heading and batting inflated beach balls around while

others sang in excitement in anticipation of the upcoming match. The songs were standard United efforts, with no mention of the anti-takeover campaign to be heard. I spent the time up until kick-off wandering the streets, looking dejectedly for some sign of the protests that I had expected. I walked through the area where most Arsenal supporters were congregated outside pubs, and it was there that I finally found signs that Manchester United had just been taken over by Malcolm Glazer. Some Arsenal fans had brought small American flags with them, and others had home-made signs bearing slogans such as 'USA' and 'Tampa Bay Reds', along with mock-Manchester United club crests featuring some derivation of Disney - McDonald's - Coca-Cola characters and logos replacing various aspects of the crest.

There were chants of 'U-S-A' aimed at those passing United fans dressed in team colours. I shook my head at the irony that those fans who could be identified by Manchester United colours would clearly not be the type of fans that mocking references to the takeover would trouble. It seemed that the media coverage generated by the campaign had convinced not just the protesters such as me that there was wider support for the campaign, but also fans of other clubs too. The silent, passive majority were clearly a bigger majority than we thought.

As I queued to get inside the ground just before kick-off, I remembered that this was the FA Cup Final. I was shocked at how little I had thought about the match itself, and how little the result seemed to matter to me when compared to the implications of the takeover and the campaign against it. Previous Cup Finals, especially those in 1983, 1985 and 1990 had been, in contrast, games that were defining moments for me as a young United fan. There was a feeling around those games of being part of a rich history and cultural tradition. This match - while being staged at Cardiff rather than the traditional Wembley certainly added to the feeling of anomie - felt empty, devoid of that history, tradition and real meaning.

The first thing I did when I entered the stadium was to scan the United end from my seat towards the back of the high, steep stand. The scene was rather underwhelming if you had, like me, expected to see a sea of black. Sure, there was a good effort made by many United fans, and the end did look less colourful than the usual Cup Final support for United, and certainly less colourful than the Arsenal end, but I commented to my friends who were already in the ground that if you weren't looking for the protest, you wouldn't know it was there.

The game was goal-less, and the atmosphere quite muted. There were a few rounds of anti-Glazer singing, but no sign of anything that more radical campaigners had romantically envisaged. I was very quiet and reflective for most of the game as I considered the implications of going through with my plan to give up my season ticket in boycott. I angrily said to my friends at one stage that if most United fans couldn't even be bothered to do something as simple as wearing black for one game, then why would I want to commit to a future of sitting with them when we have so little in common.

In extra time I started to get more active in my support for the team, as it dawned on me that this could be my last United game for a while. The match went to penalties, and there was a certain foreboding about the process, heightened no doubt by the numerous chances United had missed to win the game. As the final Arsenal player stepped up to take the penalty kick that could win the cup, I watched in dismay as throngs of pessimistic United fans walked up each aisle to place themselves by the exits ready to make a quick getaway, and then turned, finally, to see the impending defeat confirmed.

The final kick seemed to happen in slow motion, and as the ball ruffled the back of the net, the United end almost as one seemed to have stood up, turned round and started the rush towards the exits, even before the ball had landed on the floor. As my friends left, I sat down in my seat and

watched as the Arsenal team received the trophy in front of their jubilant support. It was disappointing certainly, but I had more troubling things on my mind. I was readying myself for making that dreaded decision to give up my season ticket which, after the disappointing showing by United fans in terms of the planned protests, I was now sure was the only thing for me to do.

I confirmed my decision to my friends the following Monday. One said that he felt sick when I told him. This made me feel bad, but I was by now determined to go through with it. I had actually posted my season ticket renewal, along with a cheque, on the very day that Glazer was to announce his takeover. There was a deadline for cancelling the transaction which I had kept in mind as I contemplated the decision. The fact I had already posted the renewal meant that keeping the season ticket was the default position, and I had to actively withdraw my support if I were to boycott, rather than just not posting the envelope. I wrote a long letter to Manchester United (as though it were a person) stating my intent to cancel my season ticket renewal, and that I would be happy to return my support when the club was in the hands of the supporters.

I cycled to Old Trafford and posted the letter directly into the ticket office mailbox. As I cycled back around the forecourt of the stadium along what was now called Sir Matt Busby Way, I stopped to allow a large land rover with a tinted windscreen the room to pull out of the forecourt car park. As the vehicle drew up next to me, the driver gestured his thanks that I had stopped for him. It was Martin Edwards, the former Chairman of Manchester United and son of Louis Edwards who had bought control of the club in the 1960s.

Edwards had always been a figure of hate, as well as derision, for United fans, and for a moment I thought about those arguments against boycotting that made that very point - here was a figure that had been around the club since before I was born, who had as much as any other

individual actively shaped the direction and policies of the Manchester United that I grew up with. He had surely been no more a suitable owner than the Glazers would be, so what was different now? The answer, I think, was not that the owners then and now were so very different, but that I was.

Further field accounts of protests and campaign meetings are detailed in the coming chapters, which reveal how some fans became more actively engaged in resisting the changes they perceived as a threat to their cultural lives, some with a more political focus than others, while the majority took a more compliant path.

The formation of FC United of Manchester was a particularly significant outcome of the more resistive tendencies, and in the context of this research project, this transforming journey was of major consequence in that it elicited the 'political turn' that would inform not only my role as an active participant in the cultural world under scrutiny, but also my role as a critically engaged qualitative researcher.

There may not have been one single *epiphany* (Smith, 1994: 287) at which my cultural, political and academic outlook was transformed, but the above accounts, together with others detailed in the following chapters, certainly represent pivotal moments around which my perspective was significantly changed. It is also clear that significant numbers of others that were engaged in this cultural world went through similar transformations.

Understanding others' understandings

A key aspect of the research always remained an attempt to understand how other supporters were experiencing the events and transformations, and how they made sense of what was happening. It was important therefore to find appropriate and effective ways of gauging the range of these understandings, and attempting to assess the social, cultural and political influences that impact upon those understandings. Initially, information was gathered by closely observing behaviour and discourse at protests, football matches, campaign meetings, public meetings and also by monitoring the discourse that fans engaged in via print fanzines and on internet message boards.

All of which proved rich sources of information, but perhaps the latter more reflective outlets of fanzines and online forums allowed a less problematic methods of gauging the supporters' perspectives and understandings. I did not overtly solicit information from other participants during the course of the actual events. This was partly due to my own deep immersion in the events as previously reflected upon, and the very much linked methodological concern to avoid any overt research activities that would either mark me out as an unwelcome interloper at the events or that might interfere with others' engagement in the activities, beyond my impact as a fellow participant.

The more retrospective accounts voluntarily and often eagerly provided by supporters, either immediately afterwards – often minutes, hours or days after the events – on internet message boards or those offered weeks or perhaps months afterwards in print fanzines, proved a valuable source of thoughtful, reflective understandings of what was happening by a relatively large number of participants. This is an advantage carried by independently-produced media such as fanzines, as recognised by Haynes (1995) and later with a more specific focus on internet fan sites by Millward (2008), in that supporters readily lay out their thoughts and feelings in a relatively culturally secure environment of loosely like-minded fellow supporters. Further to this, Millward claims that what he calls 'e-zines' are, due to the greater immediacy of the publishing technology, less likely to contain 'managed' personas than the usually better written and more contemplative print fanzines (Millward, 2008: 303).

Gathering the views of supporters published in fanzines and online can therefore carry advantages over information solicited directly from participants by academic researchers, in that it is thought to be a more culturally authentic expression due to its relatively *"unobtrusive methods"* (Millward, 2008: 307). Many hours were therefore spent on internet message boards gathering what were felt to be relevant discussion 'threads' through, as recommended by Millward, simple 'copy and paste' techniques. As a participant observer in this 'virtual ethnography' (Hine, 2000), occasional contributions were made to debates, though not to the extent of setting up particular topics of conversation, such as for instance by starting a new thread. The different types of message boards utilised included national and regional news websites that provide user comment facilities, as well as a number of independently-run interactive websites for fans of Manchester United, Manchester City and later, FC United of Manchester.

As well as gathering existing views via this more covert and relatively unobtrusive method, I also sought the accounts of a number of FC United supporters that were to be written specifically for the purpose of this research, in order to explore in more detail some particular aspects that are central to the thesis. The main area of focus was concerned with the extent to which FC United supporters experienced a political dimension to their thoughts, motivations and actions. This was achieved by approaching a number of individuals via a targeted sampling method in order to gather a range of views, from those very closely involved with the setting up or volunteering for and running of the club, and others who may have 'got on board' with FC United at some point after its initial formation. Amongst this sample were a range of supporters who via my observations, in person and online, had between them displayed a representative spread of attitudes to the question of the extent to which FC United constitutes a political as well as a cultural and social enterprise.

In order to capture these supporters' thoughts and feelings, and in keeping with the spirit of self-reflection in which I myself engaged via an auto-ethnographic writing up of my accounts and interpretations, I decided it would be most appropriate to ask each participant to write in their own words, with no minimum or maximum word-limit, an autobiographical account of their own 'journey' to FC United. Each supporter was given a brief explanation of the research context, and specifically asked to include reflections on the motivations and barriers experienced on this 'journey', whether those motivations and barriers come from being a football supporter or from elsewhere in their lives.

Analysis of Data

On the whole, this chapter has reflected upon the experience of collecting information from 'there', in the research field, but, following Clifford Geertz' acknowledgement of the dual positions of the researcher (Ellis, 1999), it is also important to account for how that information was analysed 'here', as the writing process deepened the theoretical analysis. While there was no readily defined start or end point of analysis, it may be useful to look in turn at how I dealt with the 'data' via the three broad collection methods of observation, interview and discourse analysis.

Observations took place at a number of events, such as supporter campaign meetings, protests and football matches. As touched upon in field accounts, my preferred method was to observe keenly and write up notes as soon as possible following the event. To write notes during such events was either not practical or not felt to be conducive to maintaining the

desired position of an active and inconspicuous participant. Field notes were also revisited later, during the writing process, and (re)interpreted with theoretical considerations and wider analyses more acutely in mind.

Interviews were recorded using a small audio device so that notes, key themes and relevant comments could be written up later, either immediately following the interview or some time afterwards. Taped interviews were also revisited in light of later thematic developments, and where appropriate more detailed transcriptions taken. Some interviews, such as those with representatives of the marketing and image-building organisations in Manchester, were to become largely peripheral to the eventual research focus, and so were not re-analysed in the detailed way that was the case for those interviews with football club or supporter organisation representatives.

The term Discourse Analysis is used here describe the analytical scrutiny placed upon a range of spoken or written forms of communication. For this research, such discourse has included the comments, articles and opinion pieces found in fanzines, the 'threads' of discussion and debate posted on internet message boards and news websites, the language and terminology used in official publications by football clubs and supporter organisations, the autobiographical accounts and interpretations of supporters, and also to some extent, overlapping the terrain discussed above, the verbal content of public meetings and private interviews. In each case, critical analysis of the discourse attempts to uncover or interpret the underlying values and meanings expressed, whether consciously or otherwise, always with the broader theoretical and conceptual focus of the research in mind.

In line with the literature and theory reviewed in the previous chapter's section 'writing up as a method of knowing', much of the core analysis took place, or was certainly at least sharpened, as findings came to be incorporated in to the written thesis. Laurel Richardson points out that far from the writing-up of findings being *"just a mopping-up activity at the end of a research project"*, it is in fact extremely instrumental in helping the researcher to better understand what he or she has been examining, so that writing itself becomes *"a method of discovery and analysis"* (Richardson, 1994: 516).

Certainly this has been my experience, in that by writing down my thoughts and feelings following field research helped to capture certain actions, comments, responses or reactions within a conscious, shaping memory, rather than them potentially slipping away along with

most of the seemingly peripheral 'everyday' things which pass us by. The ability this gives us then to revisit notes - in this case once the research focus had taken a more decisively political turn - has been invaluable. The analysis, largely while writing, of my own observations in this way allowed a sharper theoretical and conceptual focus to be applied than was possible at the time of many of the events observed.

Where auto-ethnographic field accounts are included, the final version of these accounts are a result of the multi-stage processes described above of observation, note-taking, evaluation, writing-up, re-evaluation and finalising. As well as bringing about the benefits already suggested, this has also allowed the inclusion of postscripts, which are occasionally included in the final version of field accounts in order to link certain observations made with the relevant context of subsequent developments.

An example of this is the reference made in this chapter's account of a pre-match protest in October 2004, in which the police's attempts to force protesting supporters into the stadium are juxtaposed with their attempts to keep fans out at a protest some months later. The sounds of the crowd heard coming from inside the ground on each occasion are also cited in this account as being of diverging symbolic significance.

Key Themes to Emerge

Throughout all of the collection and analysis of information, a number of key themes emerged which have actively shaped the direction of the research as a whole, and the presentation of the thesis in particular. These conceptual and theoretical themes are reflected in the two sections to follow, which contain the dissemination and analysis of empirical data. The core thematic framework to emerge was a distinction between those supporters that sought to resist the transformations being imposed upon their cultural habitus, and the majority who either did not understand or agree that these changes should be opposed, or more tellingly those that did not welcome the changes but did not feel that they could so actively resist.

It was from an observation of these three broad responses within Mancunian football culture that Raymond Williams' notions of the *dominant*, *residual* and *emergent* elements within culture was identified as a useful theoretical framework around which to structure the empirical chapters. Due to the ongoing developmental nature of supporter perspectives on how dominant power structures might be challenged, the themes of Chapters 6 and 7 in

particular proved difficult to neatly box off into their broad themes of, respectively, compliance and resistance. It was recognised that in many of the responses observed and documented, supporters were simultaneously projecting compliant and resistant sensibilities and actions, even where a demonstrable move in either direction was clear.

This limitations of any dichotomous movements is acknowledged when working within these themes, and indeed Williams' inclusion and use of the term *residual* highlights a far from clear-cut distinction between compliance and resistance in culture. The role of independent supporter formations, institutions and traditions has in fact previously been identified as displaying both compliance and resistance (King, 1998; Crabbe and Brown, 2004), and so Chapter 7 attempts to account for many fans' *residual* relationship with the dominant 'parent' culture. Similarly, even discussions in Chapter 6 of the aspects of football supporter culture that tend towards a closer relationship with the dominant, can not be truly representative without an acknowledgement of what Gramsci (1971) recognised as the ongoing conversation that must persist if a dominant ideology is to win consent.

Chapters 8 and 9 move the focus more emphatically onto FC United of Manchester, as above all else to emerge from the findings, and following Simmel's prognosis of culture's social role (Bauman, 1991), this represents a clear break or challenge to what might be described as the 'tragedy' of football supporters' strong cultural affiliations, evidenced most clearly in the notion of 'blind loyalty'. The level of cultural contestation and soul-searching that was observed to accompany the emergence of FC United, and which to some extent still continues, necessitated a particular focus being placed on the cultural and political implications of an eventuality that could not have been foreseen when the research process began.

Beyond Williams' framework then, other deeper lying themes emerged when contemplating the given rationale behind the adoption of different perspectives. The cultural values of football fandom were of course of prime concern, so issues of loyalty and authenticity were key. The influence however of new politicised sensibilities disrupted what were for many previously unchallenged conceptions of themselves in relation to their club. For most though, what are perceived as non-political values provided rationale for the maintenance and defence of existing cultural perspectives, as well as for negative responses to those now deemed to be in contravention of 'non-negotiable' rules of fandom, such as a demand for loyalty through what is often described, uncritically, as 'thick and thin'.

Critical observations by writers such as Sartre, Turgenev and Kierkegaard are also cited alongside more traditionally recognised sociological thinkers such as Bourdieu, Bauman, Williams and Beck, as the rationale behind conflicting responses and positions are contemplated. This process of introspective analysis rests on the consistently adhered to critical research paradigm established and reflected upon in this section, which seeks to unravel some of the complex features of the relationship between culture and power.

As well as the conflicts observed between traditional cultural affiliations and emerging political sensibilities, broader characteristics that continue to shape contemporary society were naturally seen to be impacting upon individuals who are also, after all, part of that wider social world. The largely ambivalent role played by culture, arguably in managing the relationship between the individual and society as contended by Parsons, remains a key theme. More pointedly, this maintains a recognition by sociologists such as Simmel, Levi-Strauss, Derrida and Foucault that culture has a paradoxically-charged influence on the continuities and discontinuities of the power structures within which it exists (Bauman, 1991).

More contemporary sociological concerns such as consumerism, individualisation, globalisation, community, inclusion and identity, within (post)modern conditions, are all themes which revealed themselves throughout observations and analyses, and are therefore, as with the themes described above, applied and critically assessed throughout the chapters which follow.

PART THREE

EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

The two chapters in this section are set out to present and critically analyse the empirical findings of this research in light of the central themes of supporter compliance and resistance. This broadly follows Raymond Williams' theoretical framework of cultural traditions, institutions and formations, within which notions of the *dominant,* the *residual* and the *emergent* within culture are utilised.

Firstly, **Chapter 6** establishes the context of a traditionally apolitical character in English football supporter culture, and reveals how deference and blind loyalty still persist as fundamental common-sense markers of authentic fandom.

Chapter 7 looks in more detail at how recent transformations have tested many fans' compliance in continuing in a traditionally-defined role as what Walvin (2000: 202) called *"mere poodles of the clubs they supported"*. Here we can see fans wrestling with the contradictions they encounter between established notions of loyalty and emerging ideas of fan democracy and power, highlighted by supporter-run fanzines and independent campaign organisations, within which more critical discourses and dispositions are fostered. Observations from the research field show that while the former, more traditional sensibilities maintain a hegemonic hold so that majority consensus leads most fans to cherish blind loyalty above all else, some have been led by principle to render as untenable their continued, necessarily compromised, blind loyalty.

CHAPTER 6

THEY CALL IT THE PEOPLE'S GAME

The apolitical character of English football culture

Introduction

> *"Whatever else has happened to football – a very British institution – over the past century, its rise to global prominence has served to underline its claim that it, more than any other sport, is the people's game"*
>
> (Walvin, 2000: 211)

Clearly, the tone of this claim refers relatively uncritically to the popularity of the sport of football among people, not just in Britain but also globally. The 'whatever else' opening qualification however is telling in that, as observed elsewhere in Walvin's updated history of football, the actual role played by ordinary men and women in determining not just how the sport is organised and overseen, but how they themselves might participate as players or spectators, has also undergone fundamental change.

As Walvin (2000) and many others[9] point out, despite football's meteoric growth in popularity in the late 19th and early 20th Century with the (mostly male) working class populations of industrial towns and cities, the supporters of English football clubs have never enjoyed much of a role beyond fulfilling the vital function of handing over their money and providing support for the players on the pitch. In so doing of course, they would also often provide a spectacle in themselves which arguably provided as much - if not more - of an attraction as the actual game.

References to 'the people's game' therefore must come with some kind of qualification that ownership can not be inferred in making such a claim. Far from it, through its appropriation and development from 'folk' roots via the public school system and its subsequent codification by new governing body associations in the late 19th Century, football has remained out of any effective control of those whose collective funding has provided the basis for its subsequent development throughout the 20th Century and beyond.

[9] There are a number of considerable texts on the history of English football which detail in different ways the role played by supporters. See, for example, Mason (1980); Williams and Wagg (1991); Taylor (1992); Conn (1997); Russell (1997); Giulianotti (1999); Wagg (2004).

There is a familiar irony in the recognition that a diverse traditional 'folk' game could be taken into the public schools, refined, codified and then sold back to the masses of new urban workers as they regained some of the leisure time taken from them during the industrialisation of their lives and labour. As tempting as a power or class-based critique of such developments may be, there is no doubt that the working class inhabitants of industrial towns and cities grew to love their role as spectators of this more formally bounded and regulated sport. Further developments and transformations have of course taken place in football throughout its history, and this chapter has its main focus on how football supporters have largely maintained and indeed relished their role as necessary, often celebrated, and yet ultimately subordinate and peripheral participants in what many still see as 'the people's game'.

Of utmost concern for this thesis of course are the largely recent transformations within English football that most fans, commentators and scholars agree have tended towards a more commodified, corporate, consumer-driven football culture (see Conn, 1997 and others[10]). Observations made throughout the course of this research identify wide acknowledgement amongst fans of these changes, and though tending to be accompanied by dismay, supporter responses have certainly not been uniform.

Furthermore, these different responses can not be straightforwardly sorted into neat, discrete categories. For the purposes of this thesis however, three broad themes of *dominant*, *residual* and *emergent* elements of culture, as set out by Raymond Williams in his 1977 characterisation of various cultural traditions, institutions and formations, have proved indicative. Each of these categories relates to cultural responses or characteristics ranging on a continuum from compliance with the dominant culture, through those cultural formations which tentatively or more decisively resist moving along with the mainstream flow.

While these categories provide a useful conceptual guide, it is clearly not possible to wholly separate the reactions of supporters by such criteria, and this limitation must be acknowledged from the outset. The contradictions, overlaps and perhaps above all, following Bauman (1991), the *ambivalence* observed mean that we can not for instance discuss

[10] A range of studies have examined the commercialisation of contemporary English football, which as well as Conn (1997) include King (1997a,1997b, 1998); Brown (1998a, 1998b); Lee (1998); Hamil et al. (2000); Giulianotti (2002).

incidences of cultural or political resistance without also acknowledging the compliant responses against which they set themselves and their actions in opposition. In many cases we can see occasions whereby compliance and resistance are demonstrated at the same time, even by the same groups and individuals. Indeed, attempts by supporters and campaigners themselves to make sense of these apparent contradictions represent a telling outcome in themselves.

With these qualifications in mind, this chapter sets out to consider the more compliant characteristics that have traditionally rendered English football culture as avowedly apolitical. The chapter begins by setting some historical context to complement that introduced above, along with comparative examples of other national football cultures that have revealed a more politicised character. The immediate context of Manchester amidst the transformations at the heart of this thesis is then tackled, with critical analyses that focus more heavily on those supporter responses that tend towards Williams' *dominant* cultural formations, in order to set the scene for more resistive tendencies to be explored in subsequent chapters.

Football as Diversion

Sport, and particularly football, has in the past often been bracketed into what the Roman poet Juvenal viewed as the 'bread and circuses' category of human endeavours (Giulianotti, 1999). This perspective posits that such 'trivial' activities and interests serve merely to distract people from the realities of life, and as such help to defuse any unrest which might otherwise unsettle the status quo. To this end, academic theory has often likened sport to religion in that, following Marx, it is seen to function as an 'opiate of the people'. Cultural Studies for one has a long yet heavily contested tradition of inferring Machiavellian influences are at the heart of popular culture (Held 1990; Cook 1996; Strinati 2004).

The Frankfurt School perspective of Adorno and Horkheimer is a prime example of academia's often haughty disdain for the 'unthinking' popularity of mass culture, and while such approaches certainly do not go unchallenged, ala the contributions of so-called cultural populists such as Michel de Certeau and John Fiske (see McGuigan, 1992), a temptation perhaps still remains to view the hugely passionate and highly partisan engagement so many have in sports such as football, as a persisting example of how the 'dominant classes' keep the 'lower classes' at each others' throats (usually symbolically), while the rich and the powerful sit back and reap the rewards created by what follows must be their blinkered,

divided minions.

Eduardo Galeano, within his evocative and often poetic critique of the world of football, describes how during the game's early development in Latin America, critics of football's influence on the masses came from all sides of the political spectrum. Conservative observers were prone to view this newly emerging game as further evidence to bolster their disdain for the values of the 'uncultured' poor, as characterised in Galeano's wry outtake: *"Possessed by soccer, the proles think with their feet, which is the only way they can think, and through such primitive ecstasy they fulfil their dreams. The animal instinct overtakes human reason, ignorance crushes culture, and the riff-raff get what they want"* (Galeano, 1998: 33).

Significantly, even those who Galeano terms 'leftist intellectuals' were also critical of the energy people invested in football, choosing to decry its influence *"...because it castrates the masses and derails their revolutionary ardor...(so that the workers')... consciousness becomes atrophied and they let themselves be led about like sheep by their class enemies"* (Galeano, 1998: 33). In the early years of the 20th Century, such views were especially rife in Galeono's home country Uruguay, where many still viewed football as the sport of the exploitative industrial colonisers from England.

Even when popular teams were established by workers' collectives, notably in the shipyards and railway yards of the River Plate region that straddles Uruguay and Argentina, Galeano explains how *"...anarchist and socialist leaders soon denounced the clubs as a manoeuvre by the bourgeoisie to forestall strikes and disguise class divisions"* , believing therefore that the newly emergent global game was merely *"an imperialist trick to keep oppressed peoples in an eternal childhood, unable to grow up"* (Galeano, 1998: 33-34).

It is indeed difficult to argue that football isn't a very popular diversion, given the amount of time and energy spent by followers of football in supporting their teams. Time and energy which, according to many of the above critics, could be better spent engaging in class struggle, and thus recognising the glaring inequalities and imbalances of power between the 'rich and the poor', between the 'bourgeoisie and the proletariat', between the 'owners' of production and the 'workers'.

Of course, it would be remarkable for public figure in contemporary Britain to make such

critical observations on the consumer habits of the working class. When Zygmunt Bauman (1987) wrote of the *legislative* and *interpretative* roles formerly filled by public intellectuals, he identified that there is seemingly no longer a place for such critiques of consumer culture, nor is there an appetite for the presentation of a 'better way', due to fears of being cast as 'elitist'. Whether this elitism is seen to come from the left or the right seems of little consequence in eliciting anger and outrage by press and public, as well as from those public figures that have learned that the surest way to gain public approval is to interpret life from a position of meek relativism.

Cornell Sandvoss (2003) recognises such a trend amongst televised football 'analysis', when he observes seeming reluctance or inability of television pundits to contribute meaningfully to debates that link football to wider social, cultural or political issues. The perceived need for television to attract mass, cross-demographic audiences, according to John Hartley (1999: 172), results in the conscious avoidance of 'political partisanship' so as not to offend anybody, and that it may be viewed as the harmless 'good neighbour'. Sandvoss however, through his own analysis, expresses concern that television, *"in its attempt to be a good neighbour to everyone might not be a good neighbour to anyone"* (Sandvoss, 2003: 66).

With football fans increasingly reliant on mediated interactions to act out and experience their fandom, and the links Sandvoss (2003) posits between this engagement and the negotiation of wider political perspectives and identifications (see Chapter 3 of this thesis: section on 'fans and politics'), clear implications are raised as to how fans may make sense of overtly politicised rhetoric or subject matter. As observations reveal in later chapters, it can matter little where on the political spectrum a particular stance is perceived to come from or point towards, it is the fear that there a political position of any kind is 'polluting' football's clean environment that can elicit strong anti-politics sentiment in many fans.

The popular conflation of left and right wing critiques within popular culture and media has served the dominance of the capitalist consumer market well, and Bauman therefore argues for a return to the legislative role of the public intellectual, as a means to challenge the hegemonic role of the market in contemporary society and culture (Bauman, 1987).

As detailed more extensively in later chapters, the 'hands off' perspective of 'politics' in consumer society is also dominant within football supporter culture, so that supporters like to see their deep engagement and rich cultural identity as out of the reach of 'grubby'

political life. An ingrained cynicism and often indignation towards any suggestion that what football supporters do is in any way not good for them, means that fans become particularly protective of this cultural sphere that allows them to escape the unpleasant or certainly less exciting world of their working or domestic lives, which in turn tend to be still further removed from the ambivalent world of politics.

Control

If indeed 'diversion' *is* the role football performs in society, this has largely been so throughout the history of British football, in which supporters have been able to briefly 'escape' the relatively mundane nature of their everyday lives and be part of a cultural world that has afforded a sense of freedom and camaraderie, at times relatively anarchic in nature. The social problems and subsequent moral panics this caused in Britain during the 1970s and 1980s resulted in football grounds being developed into much more controlled environments – the introduction of all-seat stadiums and enhanced security measures in particular allowing the authorities to wrest control back from the fans and restore order to football grounds (Horton, 1997; Brown, 1998a; King, 1998; Giulianotti, 1999).

This 'sanitisation' of the spaces where football fans were previously able to express their cultural creativity and often boisterous, unruly partisanship has often been lamented in Foucauldian terms of surveillance, oppression and social control (Bale, 1993), and as part of what Giddens (1991) described as the *"privatisation of passion"* (cited in Giulianotti, 1999: 81). Such restrictive measures became a constant source of conflict through the 1990s and beyond, as fans sought to preserve more traditional, active modes of support. The issue of standing in all-seat stadiums has been at the heart of such issues, as highlighted in some of the notices given to visiting Manchester United supporters by various clubs, provided in Appendix 1.

If football *had* then acted as an 'escape valve', or as a 'drug' with which to stupefy the masses, contemporary transformations in the dynamics and interaction of football fandom must surely have gone some way to curtailing or even removing that function. Such a hypothesis may be used to partially explain the rise of politicised supporter discontent, as expressed via the fanzine and independent supporter association movement (Redhead, 1991; Haynes, 1995; King, 1997b; Brown, 1998b; Nash, 2000). This would potentially challenge, though not necessarily conflict with, those views that see the fanzine movement as linked to contemporary football attracting a new, educated, middle-class fan (see Giulianotti, 1997).

It is also important to acknowledge that beyond the restrictive and controlling measures applied during the 1980s in particular, this has arguably continued through less direct means, via for instance the social inclusion agenda that the New Labour government placed at the centre of its sports and culture strategies (Mellor, 2008). This has been used as a justifying rationale by clubs and authorities for moves which seek to *"alter the behaviour of existing fans, to socially engineer the make-up of the football crowd and resist attempts by some fans to 're-create' some of the conditions perceived to prevail pre-1990"* (Crabbe and Brown, 2004: 33).

Indeed, Giulianotti (1999) points out that the ongoing transformation of the football crowd away from its perceived working class traditions and towards a more middle class, consumer-oriented culture, not surprisingly often receives backing from those with a stake in the latter, who cite what they see as the crude, chauvinistic and exclusionary nature of 'traditional' working class football crowds. Such commentators feel therefore that far from lamenting the demise of the traditional crowd, the game should happily consign it to history. By criticising attempts to resist class-based exclusion in football however, such perspectives - in paying lip-service to forms of exclusion more readily grasped within their own social circles - merely fall into the trap of *"blaming one less powerful group (the working classes) for the [historic] social exclusion experienced by others (ethnic minorities and women)"* (Giulianotti, 1999: 151).

At the heart of some of the 'cultural inclusion' perspectives on the transformations of the football crowd lie simplistic, not to mention patronising, views of the role that, for instance, women and ethnic minorities, might play in an otherwise all white, all male, football crowd. The last thing any supporter engaged in football culture desires is to be seen as a civilising influence on their fellow fans. As Crabbe and Brown (2004) as well as Woodward (2007) recognise, this represents a particularly bourgeois and neoliberal discourse of diversity and inclusion, that while highlighting genuine shortcomings within football culture, comes primarily from a habitus which sees the football crowd as something to be controlled and commodified.

Crabbe and Brown (2004) are careful to point out the continuities within English football supporter culture, as well as well as the significant elements that have changed. They cite Robson's argument that in spite of recent transformations, football remains *"the practical*

medium par excellence of the continuing expression and celebration of the core practices and concerns of embodied masculinity in a specifically working class variant" (Robson, 2000: cited in Crabbe and Brown, 2004: 37). So while it remains important to highlight how fans might rebel against various transformations, we should also acknowledge the ways in which football perhaps can still perform some of the social and cultural roles it has played in the past, even where such 'performances' might be few and far between.

Football as a 'way of life'

Football therefore shorn of the possibilities for experiencing such 'ecstatic' solidarity (King, 1997a: 336), raises the question of the extent to which football may still act as an escape from 'everyday' life. Crowds still flock to watch games in huge numbers, so football still perhaps performs the 'bread and circuses' role of which many of its early critics accused it. For many fans who regard themselves as 'traditional' supporters, we must consider, as contended in later chapters, that football performs a more central, constitutive role, and far from an escape *from* their real lives, football may be an escape *to* their real selves, or at least the selves they wish to be.

Following Marx's cultural ideal that man be able to "*look at his image in a world he has created"* (cited in Bauman, 1999: 135), the attempts by many fans to resists transformations which alienate them from football, and to retain or recreate aspects of the game according to their own values, can be seen as not only firm statements that the commercially-driven contemporary fan culture doesn't any more reflect their values, but also that football for them is too important to be seen as a mere escape, as passing entertainment. The values and meanings that are attached to football then, permeate other aspects of many fans' everyday lives (see Robson, 2000 and Stone, 2007), which goes some way to explain the politicisation of certain aspects of supporter culture, contrary to that traditionally seen in English football.

Football as a political conduit

In the recognition that football supporter culture has at least provided for its adherents some very different cultural interactions - albeit perhaps briefly and inconsistently - from those in more mainstream experiences, there exists a suggestion that in this environment fans are able to consider alternative ways of seeing and experiencing the world, and it surely isn't unreasonable to hypothesise that with a deep and consistent enough engagement, football fandom might be capable of providing a means through which supporters can, given the right circumstances, come to ask questions about their own lives and the wider social, cultural and

political environment in which they live.

Globally, there are various documented examples of football providing a conduit through which wider social and political struggle can take place. Most notable amongst these include the outpouring of violence from the 1990 match between Dinamo Zagreb and Red Star Belgrade, which is widely seen as the spark that lit the already well-dried powder-keg of tensions in the former Yugoslavia. The respective ethno-nationalist identities of Croatia and Serbia had remained defining aspects of each club's supporter culture while under the official umbrella of Yugoslav nationhood, and it was this platform of conspicuous political expression that initiated the on- and off-pitch violence that would lead into full-scale civil war (Lalic and Vrcan 1998).

Other observations of football culture as a potential sphere of political engagement have also done their best to oppose the 'bread and circuses' standpoints. Addressing functionalist claims from the 1970s (Lever 1972; Rachum, 1978) that football in Brazil does in fact play a pivotal role in subduing potential political uprisings, Tony Mason - in the midst of his fascinating insights into South American football culture - counters that while such a view might be tempting, it is *"fundamentally mistaken ... (in that) the euphoria which accompanies victories ... clearly recedes before the slings and arrows of outrageous ordinary life"* (Mason 1995: 129).

Still in South America, Eduardo Galeano provides further examples of how that continent's football heart has historically pounded to a deeply political rhythm. On the Argentine side of the River Plate in Buenos Aries, the famous Argentinos Juniors football club was established in 1904 under the name 'Martyrs of Chicago', in honour of the anarchist victims of the 1886 Haymarket Massacre (Galeano, 1998). In the same province two years later, an anarchist library was the chosen birth place of Club Atlético Chacarita Juniors, the date of this event not coincidentally falling on the first of May.

As alluded to in the example from former Yugoslavia, football boasts plenty of cases in which it has offered opportunities denied elsewhere for political opposition. FC Barcelona has long been seen as the 'national club' of Catalonia, and is said to have provided the only outlet for overtly expressing Catalan identification (including language and symbolic display) during the Franco years of 20th Century Spain (see Burns 1998). Similar opportunities for political opposition were observed at football matches in Apartheid-

oppressed South Africa (Nauright 1998) – notwithstanding the worldwide sporting boycott which helped to politically isolate the country during the last years of that regime.

Giulianotti (1999) describes how celebrations following a victory for Romania's national team quickly turned into violent political protests, the repercussions of which are seen as pivotal in the eventual downfall of Ceausescu. He goes on to cite Archetti's (1992) account of how football in Paraguay provided a platform for dissent against the Stroessner government, and how for the football fans of northern African nations matches are seen as a rare opportunity for the *"expression of political dissent or revolt, particularly among the young"* (Giulianotti, 1999: 16).

England's apolitical tradition

Football culture in England however has remained largely free of overtly political affiliation, save for the highly performative displays of patriotism that surround international competition. Certain English club fans have at times been associated with far-right political groups, such as 'Combat 18' who during the 1980s were thought to have a significant foothold in Chelsea's support. As with wider society, racist or nationalist sentiment was much more prevalent during the mid- to late- 20th Century amongst all clubs' fans, but in terms of consciously displaying or supporting political causes or ideologies, the English football ground has largely remained 'value-free'.

More than anything, English fan culture had during this time developed more of a hedonistic environment, so that it was an end in itself rather than a vehicle for or reflection of any wider ideology. Ian Taylor did put forward a Marxist explanation of football hooliganism in the 1970s, even claiming it to represent a *"working class resistance movement"* (Taylor, 1971). Without evidence of class-based, political opposition actually being articulated by football hooligans, such arguments tend therefore to rest on the establishment of a narrative of the *"capitalist character of the economy"* (Dunning et al., 2002).

That said, football fandom's role as a marker of local or national identity should not be ignored, though in English football culture rarely have such identifications strayed much beyond what Michael Billig identified as 'banal nationalism' (Billig, 1995), a perspective that could be equally useful in viewing the passionate yet often temporary resurfacing of local pride that football club fandom perhaps uniquely allows. In a similar vein, Zygmunt Bauman describes such fleeting communal gatherings as 'peg communities', in which a

particular identity is worn for the duration of the event, only to be taken off and hung up again on the way out (Blackshaw, 2005).

While acknowledging the especially aggressive or violent expressions of local or national identity that have been so often frowned upon in media and political circles, which Dunning et al. (2002) stress tend to be *between* groups of working class fans, rather than primarily against authority, football in England can be seen to have been largely complicit in 'towing the line' of national and local unity (Hargreaves, 1992), particularly in the important unifying project of preserving common ideas of a distinct 'other'. These could be intra-national 'others' in the form of regional or inter-city rivalries, as well as international 'others' such as, in England's case, Germany or Argentina (Back et al., 1998).

An interesting anomaly to the pattern of international 'othering' however has been evident within Manchester United's fan culture for some time. Since the mid to late 1990s in particular, United fans have regularly displayed explicitly anti-nationalist sentiments. Chants of *"you can stick your fucking England up your arse"* and *"Argentina"* have had the desired effect of enraging other, more patriotic supporters such as at West Ham United and Leicester City. A banner that is regularly displayed at home matches proclaims the idea of Manchester's (symbolic) independence from the rest of the country, in mock-Soviet 'Cyrillic' lettering ("ЯЕРЦВLIK ФF МАИСЦИІА"), perhaps also reflecting the political leanings of its makers. For more background and analysis of this and other related aspects of supporters' identity contestation, see Brown (2004).

<u>An all-consuming passion?</u>

The commercialisation of English football, particularly from the 1990s onwards, has had many features. As previously observed, football grounds were transformed into closely controlled and sanitised spaces, and along with clubs developing more commercially astute policies and the increasing influence of the media, football supporter culture itself was increasingly seen to be becoming commodified (Conn 1997; Brown 1998b; King 1998).

As can be seen with the range and scope of Manchester United supporters' concerns that have been observed throughout this research, all this has served to make attending football matches – in the eyes of the 'traditional' fans, particularly at the top level – a more insipid, consumer-driven experience than had been the case in the past. Football then is seemingly in danger of, if it has not done so already, relinquishing its role as an arena in which people can

‘escape’ their everyday lives in any creative or meaningful way.

From the Margins…

This perceived shift of English football from the cultural margins of society to the shiny corporate centre, to borrow terminology from O’Connor and Wynne’s (1996) observations of urban cultural industries, can be viewed in two ways as far as football’s potential for political engagement goes. On the one hand, the incorporation of football into the mainstream of British middle-class consumer culture could be seen as the death-knell for football as an arena in which people can pursue a marginal culture or lifestyle, and therefore serves to bring fans more consistently in line with conventional society, removing any anarchistic or hedonistic tendencies that naturally sit uncomfortably with the political establishment.

Utilising the ‘opiate of the masses’ perspective however, English football culture seemingly no longer provides the same kind of 'escape valve' from everyday life for cultural creativity, alternative experiences or the kinds of 'highs' that fans arguably found in 'traditional' football supporter culture. This would suggest a number of possible, though not necessarily exclusive, implications: that there isn't a need for this kind of 'escape valve' in contemporary society, that any desire to 'let off steam' is now catered for in other walks of life, that this 'steam' is now blocked up with no available escape valve, or that the 'steam' is steadily dissipated via less intense modes of contemporary consumption, including new forms of football fandom.

In any case, it is surely too simplistic a view to cast football supporter culture as a ‘release valve’ through which life’s frustrations can be vented. For fans, it is a cultural form in its own right, involving deep affiliations and meaningful partisanship, not merely linked to a desire to see a favoured team win or have a weekend tear-up as has often been suggested in less favourable portrayals. Football supporter culture certainly has a rich history of creative production, as well of course as the more passive elements of hedonism and consumption of which fans themselves are all too aware.

Whatever analogies we use to make sense of football's role in society for its fans, it is widely accepted that the commodification of football, and its support, in recent years – while lauded within official rhetoric as having cleansed the game of certain undesirable elements that had 'plagued' it through preceding decades - has been instrumental in removing much of the creative input from fans, and instead has delivered a relatively sanitised, homogenised form

of supporter culture (Conn, 1997; Brown, 1998b; King, 1998; Giulianotti, 1999).

This relocation of football's image from the margins of English social life towards the centre isn't the only such movement we can trace. Concerned supporters have manoeuvred themselves into a less marginal and more active position in recent years. Starting with the establishment of independent supporter organisations and media, via disillusionment with those in charge of the game and through to the development of potentially emancipatory new perspectives on fan democracy as observed in detail in later chapters, there has been a gradual yet halting journey undertaken that has seen some fans start to view themselves as pivotal rather than peripheral players in the structure of what they see as 'their' game.

Shared Barriers, Common Goals?

In the context of football supporters, it is clear that group identities remain fundamental, whether along national lines or among supporters of particular clubs. If football supporters are to become engaged in politicised struggles therefore, such existing allegiances must be accounted for. Similar concerns have been raised by Social Movement theorists around the restrictions brought by nationalist sentiment on the development of an 'internationalised' working class consciousness (Singer, 2002). Socialist scholars and activists often lament the outbreak of the First World War for more than the waste of millions of young lives, as the successful calls to arms throughout Europe managed to break what was thought to be an emerging international socialist movement, revealing the strength of existing nationalist feelings even amongst the leaders of communist and other left-wing political parties (Barker, 1995; Singer, 2002; Harman, 2008).

For campaigning football supporters seeking to empower fellow fans, much like those involved in the larger struggles touched upon above, the aim is not to break existing affiliations completely but to question the submissive, uncritical deference that can characterise that attachment. The rationale therefore would be that it surely must be possible to love your football club, and indeed your country, without necessarily deferring your critical faculties to those in power who purport to represent its, and your, best interests. Striking the right balance therefore in both campaign scope and tone is of key concern.

Supporter campaigns which remain relatively one-dimensional by focusing explicitly on, for example, reducing ticket prices, would not struggle to find favour amongst that club's support, as the issues and 'actions' of the campaign needn't impinge on the fans' existing

sense of allegiance to the club, and in fact often rely on it. However, where supporters are asked to engage with issues which require any kind of re-evaluation of existing values or identities, this can quite easily elicit strong antagonism as seen in debates over club takeovers, boycotts and political statements amongst fans of the three clubs observed in Manchester.

All supporters of a football club evidently share a common allegiance, which includes a desire for the club's fortunes to be positive. Beyond that however, as this thesis attests, it is clear that there are many differences of opinion as to the best ways to bring about, or maintain, a football club's success or progress, as well of course - more tellingly - as to what constitutes 'success' or 'progress' in the eyes of different 'types' of supporter.

Giulianotti's (2002) framework for instance posits that those fans bracketed as 'consumers', whether 'hot' or 'cold', may gauge a club's health predominantly by how many trophies they have won recently, or perhaps how attractive the football is, as perceived by either themselves and/or wider football audiences and media. Other criteria used by such 'new fans', or "daytrippers", "tourists" and "johnny-cum-lately's" as they are colloquially referred to within certain fan discourse (King 1998; Brown 2002), might include how many international football 'stars' are playing for the team, the size of the crowd or in the case of these fans posting on the 'Bluewatch' internet forum, how modern or impressive the club's stadium is;

> **'tlmsos'**: *"New video screens are going to be installed at the stadium sometime in february"*
>
> **'Bombswede'**: *"should be good...dont have to wait til half time to see the replays now then haha"*
>
> **'wesmancity'**: *"bout time! IMO"*
>
> **'eastlandsm11'**: *"Ditto. Thought they were great at Everton as my reactions werent as good as normal, due to some lunch time lubrication, so I got a second chance to see how poor are away form really is"*
>
> **'Coops'**: *"Quality where have you heard this?"*
>
> **'eastlandsm11'**: *"I think the subject of Video Screens was brought up at the Points of Blue Meeting, but I didn't think a definite decision had been made about."*
>
> **'N-LE-W BLUE'**: *"i watched most of last season on video screens at the bar in the concourse"*
>
> **'Fish'**: *"About time, the amount of goals I miss every season by turning away, looking*

at my mobile etc."

'nsbfl': *"As I recall, they have to install them prior to the UEFA Cup Final. I agree it's overdue though"*

'sickboyblue': *"So, will they a permanent thing or just for the UEFA cup final?"*

'MCFCTIM': *"hope so"*

'TRUBLU-8-': *"i think thats all were missing in are stadium is video screens init! be great if we get them"*

'geoffegg': *"shame that the money we're spending on them can't go towards the buying a new player fund"*

'nsbfl': *"They will be permanent. I remember reading that when we moved to Eastlands Kevin Keegan turned down the opportunity to install them, instead preferring that the cash be spent elsewhere. Given that we have such a fantastic stadium, it does seem a little cheap that we haven't put the "cherry on top" with the video screens before now. Ultimately it was determined that they were necessary at the venue of a major European cup final. That alone makes me glad we're hosting it!"*

For these fans, the modern features of contemporary football grounds do not appear to represent any perceivable conflicts with their match-day culture, with nothing here to suggest any yearning for the 'traditional' match day environments that for example, King's (1997a) 'lads' were concerned with (re)creating. Just one contributor expresses a negative response to the news, though this is fed by concerns about funding new players rather than anything particularly against the new screens. The over-riding sentiment is a welcoming one, with not only the utility of the screens highlighted but that the otherwise impressive ground appears 'cheap' without this fairly standard feature of new, modern stadiums.

While these comments in some ways suggest a close fit with Giulianotti's 'consumers', there are a few contributions that reveal something more 'traditional' (Giulianotti, 2002) First of all, one supporter refers to being an away match attender, the game itself being preceded by drinking alcohol, with a suggestion that screens can therefore be useful for watching those parts of games perhaps missed while inebriated. Secondly, one fan describes how home matches are usually watched in the bar under the stand, possibly suggesting an attempt to recreate some of the more traditional, communal or maybe 'liminal' moments away from the surveillance and constraint of the contemporary football 'stand', as evocatively described by Crabbe and Brown (2004).

Another fan makes a similar remark that the screens would be handy for catching up on parts

of games missed, though this fan points towards a particularly contemporary feature of social and cultural life, the mobile phone, as the reason for distraction from on-pitch action. This of course is a feature not limited to any particular club or even to football, but is perhaps indicative of the encroachment of new technology in to more and more fields of cultural interaction. This supporter then, recognising that one piece of new technology is a distraction from what he or she has paid to see, is happy with the news of the arrival of another piece of technology, so that any worries that the live action may interrupt the distraction can now be eased. I'm sure the likes of Baudrillard and Debord would enjoy contemplating the potential for convergence between, for instance, mobile phones and video screens[11].

Reference is made by one supporter to a 'Points of Blue' meeting, which is a 'fans forum' style event organised by the club, at which any supporter can go along to ask questions of City officials on issues of concern, so a much more open forum than the Manchester United fans' forum initiated by Peter Kenyon. It is not clear whether the fan attends such meetings, but an awareness of this kind of fan dialogue with the club suggests something more than merely a consumer-based relationship with the club.

Other criteria would clearly be prioritised by those fans which Giulianotti categorises as ‘traditional’, again whether or not they might be considered to be of the ‘hot’ or ‘cold’ variety. These supporters would place significant emphasis on issues which affect more directly the fan culture of the club, and have a particular interest in whether the club’s tradition and history are being upheld or enhanced. Retaining strong local identifications, whether via playing staff or amongst the supporters, is generally a key factor, as is having what they view as a ‘traditional’ match day culture. This might prioritise a good atmosphere in the stadium – through song, visual displays of team colours, banners and flags – which portray a strong, loyal tradition of supporting the club, and generally an antagonism towards new innovations, such as video screens.

For some fans, maintaining a reputation for violence – and therefore ‘respect’ among other

[11] A research centre at the University of Glasgow is currently working on a project – with the support of Microsoft and Arup – which aims to redress what they see as a deficit in interactive participation possibilities for the live stadium audience compared to those watching via television or the internet. Working with a concept of an *“augmented stadium”*, the researchers aim to create *“systems that allow for expression, response and sharing among a collective group”*. One scenario envisaged is a 'Shared Video' system which allows spectators to share clips taken by mobile devices with others in the stadium via 'epidemic algorithms', with large video screens disseminating and replaying the most popular photos or video clips (see http://www.dcs.gla.ac.uk/~matthew/DCS/Projects_files/case.pdf).

club's fans of a similar persuasion - is more important than the above factors, particularly those aspects prioritised by the new 'consumers'. While some of these criteria may be shared among different supporter 'types' - albeit weighted with varying degrees of importance - and therefore can unite fans in a particular cause, or at least not be a cause for friction, it is clear that there are some inevitable clashes.

A 'good atmosphere' for example, in the minds of 'traditional' fans, is seen as being directly threatened or diluted by many of the more recent transformations in the match day experience. All-seat stadia (particularly when newly built and/or out-of-town), a higher proportion of 'new' fans and more visible and ubiquitous policing at games are all seen as having negative consequences on the factors which for them may take precedent over on-pitch matters.

A proposal for a club to move to a new home therefore, with the promise of generating more income in order to finance more playing success, as well as transforming the match day experience – negatively in the minds of many 'traditional' fans as described above, but positively for families and children in the minds of club officials and perhaps many 'new' fans – clearly presents potential conflicts. Different conceptions of 'the good of the club' among the club's fans are the cause of such disagreements, despite all sharing allegiance to the club. Being a supporter of Manchester United, Manchester City or even FC United therefore, does not automatically equate to any common consensus on anything beyond 'being a fan' of that club.

Proposed takeovers in club ownership - as we have seen at both City and United - or indeed a stadium move, can dramatically bring to the fore such contradictions in a club's support. Most takeover bids promise extra revenue to improve the chances of playing success, but also implicitly or explicitly indicate a likelihood that the transformations described above would occur. This tends to rest on investors or buyers seeking to 'sweat the asset' in order to increase the club's commercial revenue (Shareholders United, 2005d).

Manchester City supporters have experienced both of those promises in recent years, firstly when moving from their traditional Maine Road home to a newly-built site in 2003, and then when the club was bought by Thailand's former Prime Minister Thaksin Shiniwatra in 2007 and then again by the Abu Dhabi United investment group in 2009. Both events came to pass without any prominent or concerted objections from City supporters, despite outwardly

sporting an identity built on notions of tradition, authenticity and passionate support linked to Giulianotti's 'hot-traditional' axes of supporter types.

The contradiction here is that while the club and fans consistently project an image which suggests a traditional, working class, partisan and above all locally-grounded supporter culture - as reflected in the club's 2005 'This is our City' marketing campaign (Burrell 2005; Porter 2005 & 2008; Edensor and Millington, 2008) - over new, corporate, passive modes of support favoured by the 'gloryhunters' to which they place themselves in opposition, when the time came to decide on what they most wanted for their club, they overwhelmingly chose to support Manchester City in their move towards the latter direction. A relatively symbiotic relationship of club and supporters in terms of fan culture rhetoric, at least in recent years, is I would argue a key determinant of City fans' lack of antagonism towards club policy as various significant transformations have been set in motion.

Official club communications at Manchester United however had for some time appeared out of touch with the sensibilities of many of the club's fans, resulting in an almost automatic reflex of cynicism towards 'the club' amongst United's independent supporter culture. Accordingly, United fans had voiced opposition to transformations taking place at their club's Old Trafford stadium throughout the 1990s, though this was not in any significantly greater scope than that of City fans when the old Maine Road ground was being redeveloped around the same time.

Similarly, while small-scale opposition was mounted at Old Trafford when the club was floated on the stock exchange in 1991, such fragmented dissent did not capture the wider imagination of United supporters, without as they were at the time an established independent fan culture, and so fanzines could not be effectively mobilised to carry dissenting information, and the paucity of any wider media that might carry any alternative messages, was of course a key reason for the instigation and success of the fanzine movement (Haynes, 1995).

Club Policies and Local Identity: 'our city' and 'dis-united'

Manchester City Football Club's 2005 *'This is our City'* advertising campaign points clearly to the different ways that both they and United attempt to position themselves as a 'brand' image in the public consciousness. It is relatively straightforward to simply observe that United are a global club and City are a local club, but we also need to look more closely at

the rhetoric and rationale used formally by each club. How this links with the perceptions each set of supporters has on how they 'ideally' see their club, and how they therefore position themselves in relation to those in charge of their club, is of prime interest here.

In December 2004 and January 2005 interviews were held with, respectively, Manchester United's 'Director of Communications' Phil Townsend and Manchester City's 'Marketing and Communications Manager' Ian Howard. The conceptual thread which ran through each interview was the relationship each club had with the city of Manchester and how this impacts upon their relationship with local fans. The views expressed reveal a telling difference in each club's perception of its Mancunian identifications, and while this certainly feeds the tone and content of each club's strategies and policies, fewer differences are found in their positioning of fans as consumers.

An overall, long-term objective stressed by Phil Townsend was that Manchester United ultimately *"aim to have less reliance on match day income"* which will mean the club increasing their efforts to develop an 'affinity relationship' via such branded products as credit cards, with more people among those he claimed were United's 75 million fans worldwide. Although careful to qualify this estimate with an acknowledgement that a 'fan' in this context could equate merely to the expression of a passing interest in the game and the fortunes of the team, it is clear that with such large numbers involved, the potential to reduce the relative financial contribution of match attenders is one relished by the club. The incentive to keep local fans happy then would clearly be reduced, as the impact of any fall in attendances would not in itself prove too damaging to the club's bottom line.

City's Ian Howard on the other hand readily stated that *"in terms of image we do concentrate on being the Manchester club...we have to because Manchester United are so good at being the global brand, and we can't compete on that level, and we wouldn't attempt to"*. This then suggests that a pragmatic acceptance of United's global dominance is a key factor in determining City's more local focus. Interestingly, particularly with respect of changes in ownership and spending power at the club since the interview was conducted, Howard did acknowledge that a move towards more global priorities is possible, though *"it would need a big change, if finances were different, and playing staff were different, then maybe, that's one for down the line really"*.

Howard went on to describe City again as *"The Manchester club, that's in touch with its*

supporters, that's got a good supporter base" before adding the importance he placed in *"being able to promote ourselves as being a club that's in touch with our base...you're talking to sponsors or potential sponsors, you're giving them the opportunity to reach that base, because we've got a good connection between club and fans, and a good image"*. The club's efforts in engaging with supporters, via prompt communication, holding fan focus groups and visiting its supporters' clubs, were identified as vital in maintaining this positive relationship.

United's efforts to reach its global fan base were the reason Townsend gave for the club recently changing its crest, in order to facilitate more effective *"worldwide branding"*. The removal of the words 'Football Club' from the crest is an ongoing source of dismay among United's more traditionally-defined supporters, who recognise this as an attempt to make the crest a more easily protected trademark. Fanzines and other unofficial publications or products therefore consciously use the old club badge to signify a more authentic sense of tradition rather than that of United's commercial image. Fans who reproduce the new 'trademarked' crest on flags or websites, or even in tattoos, are therefore mocked as representing the less traditional, more consumer-orientated 'new fan'.

United were not oblivious to local sensibilities according to Townsend, as the club employs a *"corporate social responsibility"* team who organise community work with players in the local authority areas of Salford, Trafford and Manchester, although he concedes that United has tended to feel that 'Manchester' was City's local authority and they therefore *"didn't want to tread on City's toes...for reasons of neighbourliness"*. Manchester City Council however, influenced by the *"efforts abroad"* by local agencies such as the North West Development Agency (NWDA) and Manchester Investment Development Agency Service (MIDAS), had recently stated a need for it to be more engaged with both of the city's professional clubs. This context does though suggest that it is United's global image that is a prime motive for the council, rather than the club's importance to the local people.

United are though *"quite focused on trying to encourage people from Manchester to come to the ground"* according to Townsend, though *"the big problem is that we don't have any tickets"*, going on to acknowledge a lack of space for *"the next generation"*, citing an average of 12,500 applications being turned away each match the previous season, and the average age of season ticket holders rising. With this in mind, the club had made 500 tickets available to local youngsters, though at first these were only available to book in advance via

credit card which unsurprisingly drew criticism, so now tickets were being distributed via local schools. The Old Trafford ticket office, claimed Townsend, would be against cash payment on a match-by-match basis: *"the thought of having a guaranteed 500 lads turning up on match days I think they would resist"*.

Townsend acknowledged that a different approach is required for fans based locally and elsewhere, stating that *"match-going supporters have a different experience of Manchester United than those who watch on Sky, similarly to those who watch in a bar in New York in the early hours of the morning...you've got to talk to them as intelligent people who understand the bits of Manchester United that they understand"*. The need for the club to know what those different bits of understanding are was therefore a key priority. Fans who only want match tickets for example are, Townsend recognised, irritated by receiving credit card leaflets, so the club would want to avoid such clumsy and also costly practices.

Likewise, City have shown that by engaging more with their match-going supporters, they are able to develop a more nuanced understanding of who their fans are and what they want from their relationship, than is perhaps the case with the wider reaching and seemingly more cumbersome approach of United. The move from Maine Road to the City of Manchester Stadium in 2003 had, according to Howard, been an opportunity for City to incorporate new technology in more emphatic customer relationships with supporters. Far from just *"selling tickets through a window"*, now Manchester City are not only able to offer more consumer options, but can also keep a record of an individual supporter's purchases via a 'swipe card' system at the new ground.

"That's meant we've been able to build a database from scratch" said Howard, citing the huge importance this has for attracting potential sponsors, as well as being of benefit to City fans who can now be targeted with more appropriate products, something not available to their United counterparts. Howard went on to state that the *"ultimate aim is to have a profile of every supporter. Every time they interact with the club, show their card, it matches to a number, and ultimately one day we'll be able to say 'this guy, he's come to six games this season', each time he comes to the game we'll be able to track purchases, 'he buys two pints and he's bought one home shirt and one away shirt'"*. This innovation, facilitated by the move to a new stadium, has made City an industry leader in this area of commercial relationships with fans, with Howard proudly revealing that *"other clubs, including foreign clubs, come down to see the set-up...and go away suitably impressed"*.

When asked whether City fans had expressed any concerns at what some may see as an undue level of intrusion, Howard said he was not aware of any complaints, and that fan feedback while at Maine Road had suggested this would be a positive development for fans, and that *"hopefully, it will just make the whole process of buying at games less fraught and easier"*.

Despite the transformations of match-day experience for City fans since the move to the new ground, and the big difference it has made to the operations and image of the football club, Howard was keen to point out that *"the move to the new stadium was never branded as being a new era, or anything like that, other media might have said that, but we've not said that, we've been careful not to do that"*. This highlights the importance most football clubs, and Manchester City in particular, place in *being seen* to be upholders of tradition, even when their actions betray at best an ambivalent attitude towards traditional concerns into which fans invest so much emotion. They were careful not to say it, but they still did it, with confidence that the fans would therefore accept it, which they did.

Linking the image of the club to the image of the city was something that Manchester City had clearly put a lot of effort into, and United also expressed a willingness to help promote the city through its own strong presence. How both clubs see the symbiosis between themselves and the city of Manchester is indicative of each club's appreciation of what the city and themselves have in common. Ian Howard highlighted research findings by Manchester City Council and Marketing Manchester that revealed how locals and non-locals viewed the city, along with a similar survey City had undertaken with its fans asking them to describe how they saw the club.

Following the same line as Chief Executive Alistair Mackintosh, as reported in Chapter 2, Howard claimed that the views people gave of Manchester matched *"almost entirely, exactly our own research with supporters asking what they think we stand for"*, which included descriptions of Manchester as 'cutting edge', 'fashionable' and streamlined', with Manchester City thought of as 'streetwise' and 'credible'. *"You might say all supporters would say that about their team"* conceded Howard, *"but you couldn't say that about Norwich or Southampton or Middlesbrough"*. When asked whether the city is more authentically represented by Manchester City than by Manchester United, Howard replied that you need only look at these survey results to see that *"(the) answer would be yes, because...the brand*

ideas that you attach to the club would be the same brand ideas that you attach to the city".

Phil Townsend admitted as far as Manchester United go, that *"we're an organisation that doesn't say often enough that we're proud to come from Manchester"* and claimed to be *"quite enthusiastic about getting involved and getting United out and about in the community and promoting Manchester"*. He also feels that United's global image as modern and successful makes the club well placed to represent its city, as this reflects well the image Manchester as a city is also projecting.

Responding to a suggested disparity between United's global, corporate image and those characteristics more cherished within elements of the club's supporter culture, as well as City's image that tends to lie closer to the latter, Townsend said *"having a world class club in a world class city is not something that we should necessarily be ashamed of...we shouldn't be embarrassed about that and nor should our fans, and I think on the whole the fans are proud of what United have achieved"*.

Focusing specifically on the city, Townsend went on *"I don't think that Manchester should be striving to have an image harking back to the days when, frankly, it wasn't cutting the mustard as an international city"*, before adding *"you don't have to be uncool to be world class"*. This view is perhaps predicated to some extent on what Merrett (2001) recognised as a common tendency to paint local resistance to corporate encroachment as a kind of regressive fundamentalism that seeks exclusion-based parochialism. Numerous examples are put forward by Merrett of such local struggles actually representing more inclusive and progressive solutions than initial observations may suggest.

Townsend is therefore acutely aware of the negative response the club's global branding receives within United's independent supporter culture. After referring to the *"essence of the Manchester United brand"*, Townsend checked himself before acknowledging *"I know a conversation like this would irritate the shit out of a lot of United fans but...to be fair I've spoken to Mark Longden and Jules (Spencer) at IMUSA, and their view is that they've never been against the club making money, just (for us to) be proportionate to regular match-going fans"*.

City's Ian Howard raised an interesting point in terms of the contrast in image both clubs project amongst the wider UK population, which he feels has an effect on each clubs' allure

for the city's large student population: *"We tend to pick up quite a few supporters from the student population, who move from wherever, they're probably an Arsenal, Chelsea, Spurs fan, and they'll tend to have an anti-United feeling...I meet many people who say they started supporting City when they were at university here...if they're not into football they might go to see United, but if they are into football, they're more likely to go to see City"*.

Townsend also pointed out the fact that while City certainly covet their local identifications, they can also be quite envious of United's global popularity: *"Nothing pisses City fans off more than every time you go abroad and you talk about Manchester they all go 'Bobby Charlton, Manchester United', but nobody says, well they don't know who Franny Lee is, you know"*. The effect of United as the 'significant other' in Manchester, to whose image they are exposed even when they travel abroad, is therefore extremely important for City sense of themselves.

According to Howard, as a result of this City are by default imbued with certain characteristics such as *"downtrodden"*, *"not particularly successful"*, having a *"loyal support"* and displaying *"gallows humour"*, going on to suggest that *"those things only exist because you've got United's success, so yes it's important in a perverse sort of way, but City fans love all that...it becomes like a badge of honour, and no matter how crap they are, and no matter how successful United are, we're always going to stick with the club through thick and thin"*. On some United fans' expression of similar sentiment in nostalgia for their less successful days, Howard remarked *"I think they're being a bit parochial"*.

It is clear from the views of each club's representatives that both City and United have a fair understanding of the values held dear within the respective supporter cultures of either club. That City place much more emphasis on the local identifications of their fans is very telling, and arguably creates a level of symbiosis between 'club' and fan that is mostly absent at Manchester United.

United's policies are clearly focused on turning more of its supporters around the world into consumers of the club's products. This reflects the aim stated by United's former Chief Executive Peter Kenyon to *"monetise the global fan base"* (Brown, 2007: 619), as well as the recent 'strategic' and 'infrastructural' advances made (compared to other major clubs) by Manchester United on developing ways of exploiting the new media opportunities reported by Boyle and Haynes (2004: 116).

While Phil Townsend revealed a keen awareness of how those policies cause friction with and embarrassment to the club's more independently-organised supporters, he was nevertheless unapologetic about United's strategy. Any concerns United may have about prioritising local youngsters and future generations of fans generally, was couched – following Lyotard and Bauman - in pragmatic language of efficiency or utility rather than exuding any genuine concern about local roots, tradition or inclusion.

The same can also be said for City, whose explicit local identifications were described as a pragmatic acceptance of United's global dominance. Their attempts to 'get to know' their match-going supporters were unabashedly presented as mere means to commercial ends, with their 'narrower margins' compared to United (at the time this was the case!) perhaps an understandable motive for their closer 'tracking' of fans' consumption habits.

The antagonism United fans direct towards those in charge of their club, and the lack of such conflict at City, is undoubtedly largely due to the relative distance between club rhetoric / policy and the values most cherished by the fans. This has manifested itself in a an almost total lack of organised independent fan campaigning at City, whereas Manchester United's more independently-organised supporter groups had built up a deep cynicism towards their club over recent decades. The resistance these United fans put up during the Glazer takeover and beyond, and the compliance and enthusiasm that characterised the response of City fans to two takeovers and a ground move around the same time, is of huge significance to this context of how fans perceive their collective relationship with 'the club'.

<u>“this open-air kingdom of human loyalty”</u>

As reflected in this observation on football fandom by Antonio Gramsci (cited in Galeano 1998: 34), notions of loyalty have permeated supporter discourse as long as ideas of fandom have existed (Mason, 1980; Taylor, 1992). It seems likely though, given Gramsci’s overall critical outlook on culture and society, and in particular the hegemonic basis of power relationships therein, that in making this seemingly positive claim for the virtues of football he would have at least raised an eyebrow over his use of the word ‘loyalty’. Certainly over the course of this research, the concept of loyalty has cropped up time and again as supporters have struggled to make sense of the transformations taking place around them.

Within the often complex and contradictory culture created, inhabited and maintained by

football supporters, loyalty has remained seemingly untouchable as a criteria for judging supporter authenticity. While issues such as the display of culturally specific knowledge or the performance of rituals, and more recently locality, have been utilised on a regular basis as measures of supporter credibility, perceptions of loyalty have always remained paramount concerns when fans' cultural capital is being weighed up. Accordingly, amidst the cultural turmoil of events observed during this research, any suggestion of taking a position that threatens to undermine notions of loyalty has in the majority of cases been dismissed out of hand.

It is important to recognise that despite the transformative changes in perspective undergone by some Manchester United supporters, the vast majority of United fans reacted to the minority's decision to boycott, and subsequent efforts to set up their own club, with incredulity and disdain, typically stating proudly "there's only one United" and generally questioning the loyalty and authenticity of such actions. These sentiments are summed up by some of the posters on a thread on the 'BBC 606' internet message board in June 2005. The first of which reads;

> **'jazzmantra jazzmantra'**: *"If you support FC United now...you were or never will be a proper MU fan. I am gutted at whats happened but change my loyalties, never. Take a good luck at yourself boys. You may aswell support Arsenal or Chelsea."*

This fan's negative appraisal of the emergence of FC United finds broad agreement amongst most of those responding to the comments. As the thread of discussion continues (below), the 'common sense' ways that football fans understand and interpret the notion of an authentic, loyal football fan are also revealed. It is clear that some of what these fans see as irrefutable rules of being a 'proper' football fan have been broken by their fellow 'boycotting' Manchester United supporters. This has been compounded, or perhaps merely made more visible, by the fact that the boycotting fans have set up a 'replacement' team in the form of FC United. By invoking some unwritten rules of authentic football fandom, the fans posting here in many ways make explicit those common sense aspects of being a fan that Bourdieu would term the 'doxa' - those structuring aspects of our lives we think with but not often about (Blackshaw, 2005).

> **'mattbusbyway'**: *"Agree...if the FC United fans and others bought shares in MU before this period then we wouldn't be here now. The fact is that we where always open to this kind of threat...There has always been two parts to a club, the business side and the team I will always support the team it will survive even if the company went bust*

because I and others like me will be with them"

*'***kris srikanth'***: "they are scum. they make us look like fools. i hate them"*

'red devil 4 life': *"in my opinion these so called fans who are backing this new united "team" are not united fans at all. A real fan will stick behind there team through good and bad times, not bail out when something happens they don't like!! whats going to happen when this new tam of theres gets relegated to the manchester sunday morning pub league??"*

'Not': *"we have, to a large extent, been owned by rich people who care little about the club for a long time; the difference now being that we are in debt. This shouldnt be a reason to desert Utd."*

'Ice Ice Ady': *"I could never walk away Manchester United, its in my blood and it sickens me that some "so called fans" have now decided they don't like the current sent up so are going to walk away. Manchester United is not just a football club, it's a history and as far as Shareholder United go, trying to say they are going to take the clubs history with them, what a joke. They're not real fans, just a bunch a plastic's!!"*

While many of the fans express displeasure at the fact of Glazer's takeover of Manchester United, they are clear that this is no way could ever convince them to withhold their support, let alone as one fan puts it, to *"change my loyalties"*. The fact that the club has been exploited by rich owners in the past is used as a precedent, by asking what is so new about this situation that would justify such drastic measures as a boycott or starting a new club.

Mirroring *"unfounded"* and *"historically inaccurate"* criticisms of protesting Manchester United supporters highlighted by Brown (2007: 617), blame is also attached to the fans – not just because they didn't buy up the shares before Glazer did – but for failing to see that as a Plc, this kind of takeover was in many ways inevitable and therefore fans now have no right to be too upset. This is especially so because *'the team'* is ideologically separate from the club's *'business side'*, and therefore fans' loyalty to the team should never be impinged upon by such peripheral matters. The *"in my blood"* claim reveals another commonly-stated reason for refusing to boycott. Similarly, during face-to-face discussions and at public meetings, many fans would concede that they respect others' decision to boycott, but that ultimately *'I just love them too much to leave'*.

'Chew Baccy': *"As Man United fans you are generally accused of similar things as us LFC fans...but to turn their back on their club because there is the slight chance that Glazer will ruin them plays into the hands of all those people who accuse United fans of glory hunting. I feel you should stand together and tell Glazer "DO what you like to this club, you'll never get rid of us"*

'RVN_10': *"I think the people who are handing in their season tickets are mistaken. They'll have their tickets snapped up, and the stadium will lose some of its best fans.*

That'll be the net effect of their action"

'The_reds_go_marching_on_on_on': *"obviously i think its ridiculous how people are settin up this club before they've even gave the man a chance, if they were real fans they'd atleast see what happens. They have took it way too far"*

'sushi_fiesta_57': *"Won't it be funny if we (Man Utd) win a collection of a good few trophies next season, what will all the FC United rebels say then? Oh, and it would be OT every time"*

'A Hoser': *"What are you guys doing? You're banning Man U. from all European competitions just because they are in debt? What arer you nuts? You call yourselves 'loyal fans' for doing this? Man, you guys a losing your heads. Maybe Glazer is winning this battle over all, he's got all your minds messed up...You guys are a bunch of pompous ingrates. Go to a Man U. game. BE A MAN. So what if Glazer is making money. It's the team your worried about. I know why you guys are so pissed. It's because the guy is American...Get over yourselves. You guys sicken me."*

The fans above however are more straightforward and blunt in expressing their disagreement with boycotting fans, who are variously *"scum"*, *"plastic's"* or *"pompous ingrates"*. More than one fan expressed sentiments that the actions of the rebel supporters *"sicken me"*, with most agreeing that they are *"not real fans"*. Perhaps Kierkegaard's notion of 'ressentiment' (Poole and Stangerup, 1989), touching on Sartre's 'bad faith', has relevance in this exchange, as one fan suggests that the boycotters would damage the club because they are *"some of its best fans"*, and maybe because of the ongoing prominence of this relatively small number of protesting supporters, another complained that *"they make us look like fools"* followed up simply by *"i hate them"*.

There is a general pragmatic acceptance of the takeover, and it is telling that many fans felt that concerned supporters should 'wait and see' and give Glazer a chance to prove himself. This perspective is considered in more detail in Chapter 7, specifically when the tactics and rhetoric employed in the 'Not For Sale' campaign are critiqued in light of how the boundaries were set for how most observers and fellow fans understood the protestors' cause. Following Lyotard, this argues that through a pragmatic emphasis on economic *'performativity'* (Blackshaw, 2005: 137), the perceived legitimacy of the outcome was not judged on the cultural, political or ethical grounds on which many fans were fighting.

'Doidoi': *"Do you think...that if in 5 years time, we have won the CL twice, the premiership three times, the F.A. Twice, the League Cup once, have a channel on t.v. that just constantly shows Man U games and chat, have some of the world's greatest players, play in front of a packed 75,000 capacity week in week out, are more profitable than Chelsea and have the best youth players and management in the world, that our biggest rivals (F.C. United, obviously) would dissolve and all their supporters start supporting us and the man on a mission (Glazer)? I reckon they would. What we*

should do then is ban them from O.T. and prevent them from supporting the club. That would show them."

It is also interesting to note the tactical error fans posting here felt the boycotting fans were making, in that not only would eager newcomers be sure to fill their vacated seats, but the boycotters would inevitably regret their decision once United won some more trophies. Other factors that would likely tempt the fans back, according one fan include a dedicated Manchester United channel on TV, a packed stadium, world-class players and being highly profitable. Giulianotti's (2002) taxonomy of spectator identities would position such 'attractions' firmly within the *'consumer'* sphere of fandom, and as factors therefore clearly not too high in the priorities of the *'hot traditional'* support associated with those in United's independent supporter movement (Brown, 2004). In light of the boycotting fans' perceived break with tradition, Chapter 9 contains a critique of Giulianotti's taxonomy that recognises the lack of a place it provides for more politicised elements of football fandom.

Perhaps the most striking feature of the above fan comments, which touches upon one of the most fiercely contested issues amongst those who were opposed to the Glazer takeover, is the argument that *'walking away'* is easy and cowardly whereas *'staying to support your team'* is the more difficult and therefore brave action to take. *"I and others like me will always be with them"* suggests that the team needs the fans to *'stand by them'* in tough times, perhaps conflating the *'thick and thin'* concept usually associated with on-pitch failure, with the cultural, economic and political issues with which some fans are now concerned. The *'captive market'* attraction for would-be investors in football clubs (see Conn, 1997) is unintentionally highlighted by a generally sympathetic Liverpool fan who advises that in the interests of loyalty *"I feel you should stand together and tell Glazer "DO what you like to this club, you'll never get rid of us""*.

The penultimate 'poster' is clearly struggling to understand the rationale behind the boycotters actions, feeling therefore that *"you guys are losing your heads...Glazer is winning...he's got all your minds messed up"*. Reference is also made to the publicised threat by some fans to invade the Old Trafford pitch during United's upcoming Champions League qualifier, in order to get the game abandoned with the hope of United receiving a financially costly ban from European competition (Sunday Times, 15/05/05). The poster's argument that this was *"nuts"* because it would cost the club money, emphasises this lack of understanding of the protesting fans aims and objectives.

Fans Football Club City?

When the idea of a similar supporters' team was publicly called for by equally disillusioned Manchester City fans at this time, most City supporters echoed the feelings of their United counterparts above, in refusing to even contemplate the idea of a boycott or a 'breakaway' club;

> *"I don't know how these people have the cheek to call themselves city fans. I'm sure I can speak for a lot of other fans when I say we pride ourselves on being city till I die. That means sticking with the club through think and thin…These people make me sick if you're a city fan how can you even contemplate about watching a different team. City till I Die"*
>
> posted by 'ste, mcr' (Manchester Online, 27/07/2005)

I discussed earlier the concern that many football fans have with preserving a certain image for their club, even in the face of internal criticism shared by fellow fans of the club. Particularly relevant in such considerations is the critical edge Manchester United supporters developed throughout the 1990s, underwritten and reflected in part by their ideologically differentiated conceptions of 'club' and 'team' (King 1998; Crabbe and Brown, 2004), which positioned the ugly business side of 'the club' as separate from the fans' more emotional view of 'the team'.

This imaginary compromise was of course not without its problems, highlighted through its rejection by those fans that chose to boycott in 2005, who by then saw this to be an unsustainable and ultimately disempowering compromise. This perspective had however paved the way for the acceptance of a more critical discourse amongst United fans, who had begun to feel that the club's corporate policies were 'fair game' for criticism, divorced as such commercial dealings were perceived to be from the fans own 'traditional' vision of their club.

Manchester City supporters however do not have such a recent history of dissent within their fan culture. The image of Manchester City as a community-based, authentic, working class, local football club is a key ingredient in how City fans have come to define their club, as highlighted in the interview responses of Ian Howard. This was clearly set up in stark contrast to the image of United as the globally-orientated, inauthentic, corporate 'plc' that City fans so detested (Brown, 2004; Edensor and Millington, 2007).

Romantic images of Manchester City are perhaps most clear when the club's fans are

discussed. In David Hand's (2001) article on such popular understandings, one academic is cited as claiming that Manchester City supporters represent *"a snapshot of better days gone by ... holding on to values that few people believe in any more, but which are so important"* and are *"in it for the duration when all around them (are) fickle and transitory"*. These characteristics are then attributed to *"their 'working class' origins, Manchester's industrial past and the legacy of trade unionism within all of which the values of steadfastness, solidarity and defiance in the face of adversity were generated and upheld"* (Hand, 2001: 106).

So while United supporters had maintained a passionate connection to their club *despite* its negative public image, City fans had done so in part *because of* their club's more positive image. This has appeared to present a barrier when City fans may have wished to criticise the corporate direction in which many could see their club heading, particularly in light of the move from City's traditional Maine Road 'home' to what the club described as a brand new *"£154 million facility"* at Eastlands (MCFC, 2004).

Because the image of the club as a whole had become so wrapped up in these warmly-regarded notions of community and local authenticity, it is possible that for fans to draw attention to the contradictions between this public image and the institutional reality may have proved too serious a disruption to the increasingly tenuous identifications the fans hold so dear. Walter Lippman, the prominent American PR guru, referred to the need for corporate interests to *"degrade signification"* in order to manufacture the public's consent on potentially contentious issues (Ewen, 1976). Such tactics are perhaps reflected in the Manchester City's PR efforts in controlling the language and symbolism used when communicating with fans over the move from Maine Road, to avoid a perception of this representing *"a new era"* (author's interview with Ian Howard, MCFC Marketing and Communications Manager, 12/01/05)

In the late summer of 2005 however, as touched upon earlier, a group of prominent figures from Manchester City's independent supporter scene publicly criticised the club's corporate policies, bemoaning the effect this was seen to be having on City's fan culture. These criticisms accompanied a stated desire to set up a similar City fans' venture (tentatively named Fans Football Club City) to that recently undertaken across the city with FC United. Below we can see how fear of ridicule appears to have fuelled much of the antagonistic reaction from those City fans who clearly sought to maintain their club's positive public

image;

> *"How utterly tragic. These whining idiots will just give the rags ANOTHER reason to have a pop at us. When FC United pull in 4000 and FFC City get 150 (if they're lucky) they'll have succeeded in making City fans everywhere the laughing stock of football. AFC Wimbledon had a genuine grievance and the whole of football is behind them. FC United is a pretty laughable enterprise, dreamed up by some bitter reds who thought nothing of paying for 6 kits a season and having merchandise/TV channels rammed down their throats, but kicked up a fuss when an AMERICAN wanted a large slice of the spoils. FFC City? What have THEY got to gripe about? A superb stadium with plenty of opportunity to get tickets if you really want them (and reasonably priced in comparison), a hardworking and talented manager and a host of bright young talent coming through. It's so hard being a city fan, isn't it? Idiots."*
>
> Posted by Adi, Prestwich (Manchester Online, 27/07/2005)

Not only does this quote reveal a desire to protect Manchester City's public image, it also highlights the need to polarise the two Manchester clubs by stressing the aggressively commodified nature of United's support 'in comparison' to what he feels to be the more reasonable and optimistic picture at City. A similar picture emerged when City had their own takeover to contend with two years later, when former Thailand Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra bought the club amidst a relative fanfare of excitement and enthusiasm from City fans. Shortly before the takeover was finalised, Manchester City officials released a statement that called on any remaining small (supporter) stakeholders to relinquish their shares, so that the prospective new owner could release funds to secure a new manager and playing staff before an impending transfer deadline which marked the start of the 2007-08 league season.

Manchester City fans were therefore left in no doubt that if the buy-out of remaining shares was not completed quickly, the club would have to wait until the following January to strengthen the playing squad with the funds promised by Shinawatra. What follows are some responses to this news by City fans posting on a 'thread' on the 'Bluewatch' message board – an organisation set up as the *"independent MCFC supporters union"* (http://www.bluewatchmcfc.co.uk);

> **'benka':** *"If there's One Thing This Takeover Proves…It's that Manchester City Football club is/was owned by it's fans. Unlike Stretford which was owned by the institutions and a few speculators…I will be selling mine over the weekend or Monday"*
>
> **'BleinUSA':** *"What this truly shows is how much City supporters love their club. It shows that the supporters will do whatever it takes to see this team succeed. It makes me proud to be a Blue. When you're a Rag...you're part of a corperation, when you're a BLUE....you're part of a family. That is one of the biggest differences"*

'BlueinUSA': *"Lets go people! Those who haven't sold yet, get off your asses and sell them. If you want to keep one share for posterity fine, sell the rest though! I want that announcement to happen on Monday"*

'apwebb85': *"I have shares but can't find the certificate, how do i get rid?"*

'tommy gunn': *"I never knew the small shareholders could be so vital. I predict a major fuck up"*

'mcfc derry': *"Exactly…This is what the trust realised and why it was formed - ie a shit load of shares were just sat there and had no representation…here's a real chance for someone with an over inflated ego who owns x amount of shares to think he can play "let's be businessmen""*

Three important perspectives are apparent in these supporters' reactions. Firstly, that the existence of individual supporter shareholdings is seen as a positive thing, as there is a suggestion that ordinary fans can and do enjoy, in some ways at least, a level of ownership in the club. Not only does this apparently prove the fans' deep affections for the club, but it reinforces an existing view of Manchester City as a community based 'family' football club. This is clearly seen as representing a huge contrast to Manchester United, whose shares are/were seen as being owned by faceless corporations and purely financially-motivated investors.

Secondly, any Manchester City fans that do own shares, and thus in doing so are representing how special the club and fans are, are implored to sell them immediately in order to convince the soon-to-be owner that there will be no obstacles to him gaining total control, thereby 'allowing' him to invest his money in new players. This obviously serves to override the previous sentiments by placing a heightened possibility of immediate playing success ahead of what were, in almost the same breath, being proudly trumpeted as fundamental aspects of the club's identity.

Thirdly, as alluded to in the penultimate post, and elaborated further in the final quote, is the assumption that issues and dealings over such lofty matters as football club ownership are no terrain for mere football fans. Having a souvenir share certificate is one thing, and in fact is to be lauded as a sign of loyalty and a reflection of the club's special status, but on no account are these would-be share-traders to get ideas above their station by exercising the rights that usually accompany shareholdings.

What this 'thread' of supporter reactions highlights more than anything is the

interchangeable and blatantly contradictory perspectives adopted by many football fans, in this case often evident from one sentence to the next. So while we can see the promotion of intangible and emotionally-driven definitions of the club's identity, proudly stated as 'proof' of this club's moral and cultural superiority over their rivals, we see an almost simultaneous pragmatism that recognises a more urgent desire for the on-field success that ironically is so regularly held as a sign of their rival's lack of authenticity.

The disdain shown towards those – in the event, non-existent – fans who it was feared might scupper the big-spending plans of the new owner by stalling the full takeover of Manchester City was equally telling in terms of the cultural, social and political values held by many football fans. Large elements of supporter culture are based upon a 'common sense' understanding that fans literally 'follow' their club, and the attendant notion of blind loyalty dictates that beyond just having to 'like it or lump it', the less the fans like what their club delivers, the more loyal fans are able show themselves to be. Such logic was apparent in a favoured song of City fans, adapted from the mocking references of United fans to the many years that had passed since Manchester City last won a major trophy: *"Thirty four years, and we're still here"*.

Of course, while taunting neighbour's City over their lack of success, Manchester United supporters are prone to point to their own barren years as 'thick and thin' proof of the loyalty of the club's fans. The twenty-six year period between 1967 and 1993 is seen to represent the 'thin' through which United fans endured what for them was the relative hardship of failing to win the English League Championship, before being rewarded in spades during the 'thick' years from 1993 onwards.

Although United had some intermittent cup success during that time, the 'perennial underachievers' tag was applied partly as a result of the expectations drawn from the status earned during the 1950s and 1960s, but mainly due to the huge crowds which made the club the best supported in the country throughout the 'title drought' of the 1970s and 1980s and beyond. The role of Liverpool as a hugely successful rival during this time is also relevant to United fans' sense of under-achievement.

United fans then have shown that they are just as adept as their City counterparts at picking and choosing which perspective to see things from, as they variously seek to revel in the huge success their club has enjoyed in comparison with their rivals, while at other times

defending their status as authentic and loyal fans by pointing to their own barren spell. It is clear then that the vagaries of cultural discourse allow football supporters to 'shape-shift' according to different situations, seemingly at the drop of a hat, between the form of a success-hungry pragmatist, either revelling in or desperately seeking the reflected glory of titles and trophies, and the figure of a down-at-heel romantic, shunning the glare of success in favour of more culturally-valued notions of loyalty, kinship and ultimately, authenticity.

Authenticity exists, as with many of the competing perspectives and cultural values discussed throughout this thesis, within the eye of the beholder. Its cultural essence therefore lies in its contested nature, and within popular culture everyone likes to think of themselves as authentic.

It is clear from these and numerous other fan discourses in Manchester and beyond, that football supporters have developed a very strong sense of themselves as being 'loyal' to their clubs. This strength is in part predicated on the very deep emotions that are attached to the notion of loyalty, but is perhaps just as reliant on the flexibility that fans have built into how they view it. In some ways, the adaptable nature of the concept of loyalty can be seen as quite playful when it is applied to discourse that surrounds on-field success. Exchanges between rival fans, while passionately and emotionally charged in many cases, are always contingent on each sides' adoption of a particular perspective, which can be chopped and changed almost at will, depending on the circumstances and whatever point they seek to make.

When I refer to the playfulness of such discourses I don't intend to suggest that notions of loyalty are not of real cultural and personal value to the fans, the intention is merely to highlight the readiness of fans to cast aside such romantic sentiment in the face of 'real world' problems such as, at a micro level, the need for money to buy players, or at a macro level, the requirement to accept such grubby realities, as after all 'this is the way of the world'. What I argue therefore is that while the deeply emotional and cultural engagement of football supporters can potentially yield new 'politicised' perspectives, as wider social and economic structures impinge on their culture, the more idealistic ways in which fans see their relationship to their club tend most often to be fairly easily subdued by the promise of more earthly desires. The same desires that, according to much of their 'folklore', they can take or leave.

To what extent then are these 'stories people tell themselves about themselves' (Rorty, 1989) merely a performance? Are we in reality merely the sum of the stories we tell of ourselves? Or must these stories about ourselves have to be enacted in reality to give them real meaning? Do people seek to *"...experience the 'real world' in a manner that fits the stories we tell about it"* (Bruner, 2002:103)? Those fans who seek to oppose the changes which threaten to prevent these stories remaining or becoming a reality, would argue that those values are more than just a story, more than a performance. Every other football fan would undoubtedly feel the same, but if those stories supporters tell about themselves are brushed aside as fanciful or unrealistic when faced with a dilemma which challenges the 'moral' of those tales, then perhaps the telling of such stories can't be considered as anything more than a performance.

Slavoj Zizek (1990) referred to the phenomenon of 'misrecognition' amongst both dominant and subordinate groups within oppressive structures, in which people choose to misconstrue relations of social and cultural power for differing reasons of self interest. Football fans do something similar all the time, investing great cultural value in being a subservient follower of their club, often revelling in the shoddy way they are treated. There is a commonly held belief in football culture that through enduring such an abusive relationship the supporters' status as a loyal 'subject' is confirmed, which perversely also then reflects well on the club, in 'having' such loyal fans. The following quotes from Manchester City supporters in 2005, in response to those calls for City fans to react to recent transformations in a similar manner to that of their United-supporting neighbours, sums up this perspective well;

> *'"Disillusioned City Fans"? Isn't that what it says, in Latin, on the bottom of the club crest? Being Disillusioned is what it's all about. Colin Bell got his injury on my 13th Birthday. I'm 42 now, and I've been disillusioned ever since that dark November night !!"*
>
> posted by 'Arthur Loveglove', High Security Unit, Rampton (Manchester Online, 27/07/2005)

> *"There is only 1 thing worse then coming up with a ridiculous idea and thats copying a ridiculous idea off the rags. Rag fans actually have much more reason to be setting up their own club. Our club is actually run by City fans alright not as a collective but you won't find any bigger City fan than David Makin. If you want a say you can buy shares. This bit about pricing out the working fan I'm not sure when I was a kid my dad couldn't afford to take me to every game either and that was true for most of my mates red and blue. Anyway, thanks lads for opening us up to some ridicule."*
>
> posted by Carl, Manchester (Manchester Online, 27/07/2005)

Kincheloe and McLaren (1994: 141) describe how such defensive reactions often serve to

nullify potential discourses of resistance in the face of imbalances in power when they point out that this *"willful misrecognition on the part of both the dominant and subordinate groups creates a quarantined site where the political dimensions of everyday life can be shrouded by commonsense knowledge and, in effect, rhetorically disengaged"*.

The dominant hegemony of loyalty discourse within English football culture therefore systematically marginalises those sensibilities that question the master-servant relationship between club and fan. In any other industry, such a notion of authenticity to promote loyalty would be a masterstroke of genius if it were implemented as a brand marketing strategy.

Sarah Thornton's (1995) observations of music sub-cultures show how, following Bourdieu, hierarchies of taste develop strong holds within a particular cultural habitus, which ultimately reflect wider social inequalities. Adherence therefore to strict codes which necessitate the accumulation certain kinds of sub-cultural capital, and as can be seen here the rejection of competing values, can render fans as *"agents of maintaining social and cultural systems of classification and thus existing hierarchies"* (Gray et al., 2007: 6).

As Gramsci astutely recognised however, the vagaries and contingencies of culturally-bound hegemony can not be so accurately designated. The values and meanings invested by football supporters in their relationships with their clubs have always been in flux and are constantly being pushed and pulled from various directions. Internal contestations are therefore a fact of life within football fandom, which must leave some potential for even the most deeply held notions to be tested.

While this chapter has documented discourses which highlight the contradictions consciously experienced by football fans, it has also revealed how the values most cherished by fans tend to mitigate against challenging meaningfully the structural factors that often jar so abruptly against those very values.

When the possibility of supporter rebellion is raised, the standard rebuttals of *'who do these fans think they are?'*, *'it's not for the likes of us to decide'* and *'you're right, but what can we do?'* bring to mind the 'anti-politics' attitudes lamented in Robert Tressell's now century-old portrayal of working class exploitation and apathy, even if the trousers aren't so ragged any more (see Tressell, 1993). Providing a modern-day, more affluent and consumer-driven incarnation of the novel's eponymous characters then, many of today's football fans who

happily, or begrudgingly, continue to fund football's millionaires, would perhaps wear well a moniker of *Replica Shirted Philanthropists*.

Of course, it would be disrespectful to portray all football supporters in such a light, and accordingly in the chapter which follows attempts by supporters to oppose what they perceive as negative changes inflicted from above, are brought into sharper focus.

CHAPTER 7

"I DON'T HAVE TO SELL MY SOUL"

Independent Supporter Culture

> *"I don't know, I'll never know, in the silence you don't know, you must go on, I can't go on, I can't go on, I'll go on"*
>
> Samuel Beckett, cited in Bauman (1991: 160)

This chapter concentrates on the more oppositional and resistive tendencies observed within Mancunian football culture, to build upon the previous chapter's theme of the generally apolitical past and present of English football culture. It is important to ponder then, existing as both tendencies do in the same wider cultural field, the reasons for some fans' refusal to accept so readily the dominant cultural values they see impinging upon or even replacing their own.

Raymond Williams' (1977) concept of the different positional relationships that various cultural traditions, institutions and formations have with the most powerful ideological values of any particular time and place, suggested that pulling away from the more obliging *dominant* elements are what he terms the *residual* within cultural life. It is these *residual* cultural traditions, institutions and formations in which the supporter responses detailed in this chapter are proposed to reside, though their potential to shift temporarily or permanently towards the *dominant* or the more radical *emergent* tendencies is borne in mind throughout.

First of all, this chapter will outline the development of independent supporter culture in English football, considering the influence of the fanzine movement and also the emergence of independent supporter associations (ISA's). Necessarily for the purposes of this thesis, the history of the independent supporter culture at Manchester United provides the prime context, utilising testimonies of individuals at the heart of the movement and detailing various key issues and campaigns that helped to define its development.

The author's own observations of these events, relayed in part via auto-ethnographic field accounts, are included in an attempt to provide 'thick descriptions' (Geertz, 1979) of key protests and public meetings that proved pivotal in the 2005 'Not For Sale' campaign. This chapter therefore tells the story of this crucial period through the immersed researcher's

interpretations of events and reactions, as well as a theoretically-framed critique of the tactics employed in the campaign.

How the experiences of this independent supporter movement influenced the outlooks and perspectives of a significant number of Manchester United supporters is crucial in understanding the motivations and sensibilities of those who decided to boycott the club following its takeover by Malcolm Glazer in 2005, and more pointedly of those who set up the 'breakaway' club FC United of Manchester, as is covered extensively in Chapters 8 and 9.

It is also possible to observe in the actions and reactions of both Manchester United and Manchester City supporters described in this chapter, not only oppositional tendencies but also much more compliant characteristics. Often both of these seemingly contradictory responses emerge from within the same groups or from one individual, and occasionally even simultaneously. Zygmunt Bauman's recognition of the *ambivalence* of the modern world certainly rings true for many fans here, forced to look for what Ulrich Beck astutely called *"a biographical solution to systemic contradictions"* (Blackshaw 2005: 92).

Independent fan culture and 'narrow' football politics

The disenchantment many 'traditional' football fans felt throughout English football's recent decades of commercialisation and commodification has remained a constant theme in independent fan discourse and media during this time. From the mid 1980s, independently produced fanzines gradually became a stock feature of football fan culture at each club (see Redhead, 1991 & 1997; Haynes, 1995), before the later proliferation of online media opportunities via the internet brought further possibilities of fan interaction and information exchange (Boyle and Haynes, 2004; Millward, 2008).

Manchester United fans could choose from a range of fanzines during this time, with the two most popular - Red Issue and United We Stand - presenting consistently critical views of the club. They focused heavily on match-going issues such as ticket prices and allocation, atmosphere, away travel to domestic and European games, club ownership and generally passed comment on the culture and practicalities of the whole match-going experience. The fanzines also contained regular features on other aspects of popular culture, notably concerning local music and fashion (Haynes, 1995).

Of crucial importance for Manchester United fans during this time – when their team were

enjoying unprecedented success on the pitch – was a need to defend themselves against regular challenges to their cultural authenticity. A successful team coupled with a widely held stereotype of United fans as hailing from outside of Manchester and as 'gloryhunters' - as evidenced by some of the supporter discourse and official club rhetoric considered in Chapter 6 - led to Manchester United supporters developing a self-conscious re-assertion of their identity as Mancunians and as loyal, traditional football fans (King, 1998; Brick, 2001; Brown, 2004).

This is an important issue to emphasise as, according to Brown's (1998) insights into the development of independent fan culture at Manchester United, this gave United fans a self-conscious awareness from which to not only fend off external criticisms, but also to develop a reflexive, often bluntly honest and self-critical, independent supporter culture. This perspective allowed United fans to openly criticise the club and fellow fans for actions and developments that were seen as damaging or inauthentic. This often resulted however in complaints from some United fans of 'washing our dirty linen in public'.

This readiness within Manchester United's independent fan culture to not only be openly critical of 'the club' but also to criticise large elements within their own club's wider support, is not a ubiquitous characteristic within English football supporter culture. This was highlighted in Chapter 6 by the fierce defence launched by Manchester City supporters of their club's public image (including that of its officials and directors) following a rare public airing of discontent by some critical fans who sought to mobilise independent fan campaign movements similar to those at Manchester United. As later analysis reveals then, prominent voices of discontent have struggled to find a receptive ear amongst City's wider or even independently-organised supporter culture, though the different context through which each club has developed in recent decades is a key factor in this.

Getting Organised and 'clued up': Fanzines and Campaign Groups

The establishment of organised independent structures around which fans shaped their support provides an interesting new context in which to consider the question of potential political engagement. Independent supporter groups, campaign bodies, shareholder groups and independently run media (especially fanzines) present a different level of self organisation than had existed traditionally in English football culture (Haynes, 1995).

No automatic leap from self-organisation to political engagement is suggested, but with the

encroachment of supporter discourse deeper into ‘football politics’ and occasionally beyond, the potential must be considered. A key aim therefore is to explore the convergence of ‘emancipatory’ transformations with existing 'traditional' sensibilities, as well acknowledging as some of the wider issues surrounding football clubs in recent years - in this case globalisation, corporatisation, commodification and debates around the consumption, production and ownership of culture.

By the time of the 2005 takeover of Manchester United, the Independent Manchester United Supporters Association (IMUSA) and Shareholders United (SU) were the two campaigning organisations of most prominence. Both organisations had emerged out of various other bodies set up to fight earlier campaigns against either club policy or perceived external threats.

IMUSA was formed in 1995 and brought together a network of issue-specific organisations which shared a common concern that the club were not acting in the best interests of the supporters. Brown and Walsh (1999) provide an engaged insider account of the organisation’s history and scope, particularly their central role in successfully resisting the Murdoch takeover bid during the historic 1998-99 season.

Shareholders United Against Murdoch (SUAM) had emerged during this campaign, and sought to maintain some of the momentum gained in order to guard against possible future takeover bids. The long-term aim of SU was for the fans’ shareholding to eventually pave the way for supporter ownership of Manchester United (Author's interview with Duncan Drasdo, SU Chief Executive 05/12/07). After Glazer’s 2005 takeover removed the club from the stock exchange, Shareholders United reformed again as the independent Manchester United Supporters Trust (MUST) – an Industrial and Provident Society organisation.

As Brown (2007) highlights, IMUSA and SU operate with an often delicate unity that is capable of producing great collaborative efforts where their aims are broadly shared, but that can at times of intense pressure reveal a more fractured relationship, and seemingly irrevocable differences. This latter more fractious scenario was eventually to be the case as the 'Not For Sale' campaign reached its final days before Glazer's takeover in May 2005 (Brown, 2007: 622). That said, IMUSA's Chair at the time, Jules Spencer, claimed an overall feeling of pride at the unity that existed between a wide range of different factions within the coalition, which was unique as far as he knew in English football (Author's interview,

25/06/11).

It is important to note that the members and influential personnel within these independent supporters' organisations at Manchester United were not mutually exclusive. The formation of FC United following the Glazer takeover was no exception to this. Amongst those making up the 'steering group' that took the initial idea and made the club a reality, there were a number of individuals with backgrounds in IMUSA as well as the two main fanzines.

It is also worth noting that IMUSA initiated the forerunner to Shareholders United in the form of its own 'share club' that had been set up before the campaign against Murdoch, in order to have a say at the club's general meetings and also gain access to relevant financial and strategy reports, which suggests some level of foresight of the potential battles to come. It also important to point out IMUSA's consistent stance against the club's Plc status, originally fermented through its own predecessors such as HOSTAGE (Holders of Season Tickets Against Gross Exploitation) in the early 1990s.

This opposition to the public flotation of Manchester United is little known and less often reported by many analysts who mistakenly criticise United fans for a perceived lack of opposition on this front. The same critics accuse fans of hypocrisy for having revelled the good times the Plc is said to have brought, but the club's own financial records as well as IMUSA's own statements reveal that the net effect of this status had been a drain on club resources rather than a boost. Brown (2007: 617) also points to protest songs sung by fans in opposition to the Plc status of the club.

As alluded to with IMUSA's 'share club' and later SU, the benefits that the Plc status did bring resided in the necessity for openness, not just in shareholder access to information and shareholder forums, but in presenting the possibility of future fan ownership, however distant such a dream may have been rendered by the listed financial value of the company.

IMUSA had always been clear in its desire to 'roll back the Plc' (Brown, 2007), even referring to one of the few positive aspects, the opportunity to attend the club's AGM, as *"that party of self-congratulation we've managed to gatecrash for the last couple of years"* (IMUSA, 1998b). Shareholders United on the other hand were reticent to make such a firm statement, mainly because they feared this would pose a threat to the level of access they enjoyed with the club, which, due primarily to the nature of the organisation, led some fans

to question the extent to which SU's position on key supporter issues may be compromised by their ambiguous stance on the Plc model of ownership (Brown, 2001).

That 1998 takeover bid by BSkyB had however seen United fans launch an organised and sustained opposition movement (see Brown and Walsh, 1999; Brown, 2007), despite popular press reports of huge financial investments that would be made in the club by BSkyB owner and global media mogul Rupert Murdoch. Though well organised around a coalition of independent supporter organisations and fanzines, the protests were relatively small scale in comparison to the 2004-2005 anti-Glazer campaign.

Despite the comparatively low number of fans being mobilised in this campaign, it was ultimately successful in lobbying journalists and politicians to have the takeover bid referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, which subsequently ruled against the proposed takeover on competition grounds. Tellingly, such regulatory concern was not focused on maintaining healthy competition within the football industry, but within the media industry (Brown and Walsh, 1999). IMUSA described their role in 1998, at the outset of the campaign against Murdoch, as representing *"a thin line between the club and the proverbial steamroller, but, along with the fanzines, its the only line there is as football and our club are torn apart by bankers and stockbrokers intent on milking short term profits"* (IMUSA, 1998).

Manchester United fans continued to develop a militant edge within fan politics, and led by IMUSA and SU, as well as the critical eye cast on club affairs by fanzines Red Issue and United We Stand, the United fans enjoyed a significant degree of empowerment following the defeat of Murdoch, at least in comparison to what they had before (Nash, 2000; Brown, 2001; IMUSA, 2005).

Numerous issues of fan concern, from ticket prices, away ticket allocations, stadium configuration, atmosphere, standing, away and European travel, supporter safety and fan democracy were all tackled by United fans. Gains were certainly made on many issues, and there was evidence that the club recognised a mutual benefit from such supporter representation (Brown, 2001; IMUSA, 2005), which former chair of IMUSA Jules Spencer largely attributes to the respect IMUSA gained as a credible organisation following the campaign against Murdoch (author's interview, 25/06/11). In terms of real influence however, those involved in the various organisations remained constantly frustrated at their

ultimate impotence in negotiations (Brown, 2001). As Spencer conceded, despite many positive noises from the Manchester United hierarchy, ultimately *"the proof of the pudding was in the eating, ticket prices continued to spiral and the disenchantment continued unabated"* (author's interview, 25/06/11).

The fans remained of the cynical viewpoint therefore that any concessions were only won in cases where 'the club' could see a direct financial benefit in ceding to the fans' demands (Author's notes from IMUSA meeting, 10/05/04). Spencer's experiences as IMUSA chair and also as their representative on Manchester United's Fans' Forum, initiated by the club's more 'fan-friendly' Chief Executive Peter Kenyon, reflects the cynical view many fans came to adopt regarding the utility of such representations. Having acknowledged that relations had improved while Kenyon and Director of Communications Paddy Harverson were at the club, it was clear that in the eighteen months or so leading up to the Glazer takeover, there was a less open tone in meetings and communications. Spencer reports a feeling that the club were increasingly 'digging their heels in' on more issues, so that while still being 'seen as listening', opposing perspectives were treated with an attitude of *"this is the way we're going to do it whether you like it or not"* (author's interview, 25/06/11).

One issue which highlights the frustration felt by IMUSA over dealings with United at this time, during which relations were said to have *"fallen to an 'all-time low'"*, surrounds United's invitation for IMUSA to submit seating reconfiguration plans to coincide with an expansion of part of the Old Trafford stadium, which when submitted were *"dismissed out of hand"* (Manchester Evening News, 2005a). According to Spencer, a great deal of work and research was put in by the IMUSA committee following United's promising invitation to tender the proposals, in order to ensure a more fan-friendly seating plan with no loss in income for the club. In fact, the proposals actually promised to increase United's takings (Manchester Evening News, 2005a).

IMUSA had managed to devise a proposal that would see a relatively small number of higher-end tickets increase in price, but with a lot of other tickets becoming more affordable for younger and less affluent supporters. Spencer reports that at the outset of the meeting to discuss the proposals, one of Manchester United's senior representatives interjected to emphasise that on no account should IMUSA expect any negotiations or consultation on the issue, and that this was just a meeting to discuss the club's plans. In the event, United's Finance Director Nick Humby would announce that they had taken on board the part of

IMUSA's proposals to raise certain ticket prices, but that no tickets would fall in price.

> *"We believe there is a good opportunity to increase the yield from the stadium while still maintaining very competitive prices... We can improve the stretch of those prices and look at various areas of the ground where we can increase prices appropriately"*
>
> - Manchester United Finance Director, Nick Humby (Manchester Evening News, 2005a)

United had then *"cherry picked"* the profitable parts of the proposal they liked, but disregarded the parts that might benefit less wealthy supporters. Cynically, the announcement also contained the suggestion that it was as a result of consultations with IMUSA that 'price stretching' had been implemented, though of course without acknowledging that IMUSA's prime rationale had been the 'stretching down' element of the proposals, whereas the 'stretching up' part was only included as a necessity to meet the profit-centred criteria set by United when inviting the proposal (author's interview with Jules Spencer, 25/06/11).

The growing sense of frustration felt by United fans as those in power at Old Trafford repeatedly displayed a lack of agreement, interest or empathy in the issues that most concerned them, had led, as previously discussed, to an imaginary schism developing in some fans' minds between club and team. This *"love the team, hate the club"* dichotomy (King, 1998b) allowed the fans to reconcile their active support for 'the shirts' [players] with the distrust and antipathy they increasingly felt towards 'the suits' [officials] (Crabbe and Brown, 2004).

The problematic nature of this compromised position proved increasingly difficult for most fans, who struggled with the complexities involved in attempting to equate the notion of 'the club' with some unsavoury force external to the institution which was, after all, the subject of their lifelong devotion. At the same time, they were attempting to overlook the inherently transitory nature of 'the team', which continually changes over time, while they professed their own constant allegiance to whichever Manchester United players happen to be wearing 'the shirt'.

By accepting and emphasising their own loyalty to those who run out at every match wearing the Manchester United shirt, the supporters - however much they professed their 'hatred' towards the business side of the club - were ensuring power remained with 'the

club', rather the fans. The supporters though, and certainly 'the suits', knew this only too well. As much as 'the club' might have preferred a more positive public image, the only thing that really mattered was always the continued devotion of the supporters to their team, and importantly their willingness to pay for it.

Even issues not directly targeting Manchester United Football Club often struggled to rouse the expected support of Manchester United fans. In one case, IMUSA attempted to convince the club's travelling support to take action against excessively high ticket prices charged by Birmingham City for United's visit. Despite much pre-match publicity, and leaflets handed to fans entering the ground (see Appendix 2), the planned boycott on spending inside the stadium did not materialise, with most fans buying refreshments and programmes as per usual. Even amongst Manchester United's away support, it was becoming clear that organised resistance was a far from straightforward exercise.

Seeing the bigger picture

All of these organisations had operated from a consistently critical perspective throughout much of the 1990s and up to the 2005 takeover and beyond. This resulted in issues being debated which increasingly necessitated an awareness of wider social and political environments than those traditionally occupied by English football fans.

Naturally enough, the areas of concern stemmed from relatively narrow issues which focused on fans' abilities to support their club in the ways that they wanted. Central to this was a constant grievance within independent fan discourse that rather than 'taking part' in the match as active *supporters*, fans were now merely attending an entertainment event, or more specifically they were *watching* an event, in much the same passive way one might watch a film at the cinema (or more damningly still, at the theatre). This reveals a viewpoint that posits traditional football fandom to be more active, and therefore more real and visceral, than the passive observation of mainstream leisure, entertainment and other cultural pursuits.

This view supporters had of themselves as active participants in their culture was no longer confined however to performing their rituals in the stadium or the creativity they put into their banners, songs and chants, but had now taken on more of a political resonance via the work of independent organisations such as fanzines and campaign groups. Now supporters were seeing themselves as capable of becoming more than mere 'followers' of their football

club, particularly in light of their increasingly critical perceptions of those in positions of power, such as owners and directors.

Supporter criticism of club officials and their policies is not a new phenomenon of course, but the independent organisation that gave shape and voice to such concerns throughout the 1990s had been a novel experience for most fans. In many ways, developing this more critical perspective represented a threat to, or at least a disruption of, some of the more traditionally held notions of football supporter culture, particularly those surrounding ideas of loyalty and authenticity. Indeed, a primary argument of this thesis is that traditional identifications exert a significant constraint on the development of a critical paradigm for football supporters.

If Giulianotti's (2002) taxonomy of football spectator identities is used as a framework for considering such implications, we can see that a shift towards the kind of critical supporter perspective observed within Manchester United's independent supporter culture is of major significance for fan identification. When supporter independence is taken to the extremes witnessed in the formation of 'breakaway' FC United by Manchester United supporters, the implications are greater still.

Accordingly, Giulianotti's framework is utilised in Chapter 9 when assessing this 'new' supporter phenomenon of FC United of Manchester. Before this, it is indicative to detail some of the key areas of contestation during the 2004-2005 'Not For Sale' supporters' campaign against the Glazer takeover bid.

The 2005 Takeover of Manchester United

There is a widely held understanding that as much as football clubs might be operated and traded like any other business, the 'customers' (according to traditional discourse on fan culture and identity, as highlighted in the analysis of supporter discourse in Chapter 6) can never contemplate switching allegiance to a competitor.

It is this 'captive audience' on which football clubs are traded (Conn, 1997), so when Malcolm Glazer weighed up the possibilities of buying Manchester United, he did so based upon the strengths or weaknesses of this 'brand loyalty' - terminology which may engender feelings of revulsion amongst most football fans, but which nevertheless accurately captures the role to which supporters have been reduced in football's free market. This is also

reflected in the way representatives of both Manchester United and City rationalise their relationship with fans, as analysed in the previous chapter.

Within this context, and eyeing up the potential of Manchester United's global popularity in 2004, Malcolm Glazer followed up months of speculation and supporter unrest to press ahead with his bid to buy the club. The organised fan groups, as with the Murdoch takeover bid of six years earlier, launched a co-ordinated campaign to repel the bid. This time however, the campaign was on a much bigger scale. Fanzines and press-releases carried messages of a fierce determination to prevent what most saw as extremely damaging developments which threatened their club's future.

Shareholders United urged fans to buy up more shares and commit them to their pool of supporters' shareholdings, hoping to gather together a significant enough stake to be in a position to repel Glazer's bid. The longer-term aim was of course to put Manchester United into supporters' hands. This attempt to use the parameters of the stock-market regulations to protect their club was allied with protests which aimed to convince Glazer - as well as existing sponsors such as Nike, Vodafone, Pepsi and Ladbrokes - that the fans would ensure his profit-making plans for the club would not come to fruition (see Appendix 3).

> *"The Anti-Glazer movement continues apace and signing the sponsors boycott is a must for all reds. Don't drink Bud, bet anywhere but Ladbrokes and dust down the Adidas shell toes instead of the Nike Airs until United's sponsors come out and publicly back fans in their battle"* (United We Stand, 2005a: 9)

As well as carrying a clear message for United fans to boycott the club's main sponsors, this message is also interesting in the references it makes to aspects of popular cultural consumption that the contributor presumably felt would carry an established cultural resonance with the fanzine readership. The context of drinking, betting and fashion is one in which supporter discourse sits rather comfortably, and so rather than a more strident *"don't buy Nike or Budweiser"* message, it is couched in more culturally familiar language. A context of soft drinks and mobile phones isn't so easy to pass over so casually, which may account for the omission of equally-campaign-prominent brands Pepsi and Vodafone in this supporter's message.

Protest marches outside Old Trafford on targeted match days consisted of banners and chants which proclaimed that the fans wouldn't allow the club to be sold. *"United United, Not For*

Sale" was the most common vocal refrain, along with banners and leaflets carrying the slogan *"No Customers, No Profits"*, urging fans to boycott club merchandise. A burning effigy of Malcolm Glazer outside Old Trafford would also leave observers in no doubt as to the welcome this potential new owner could expect.

The different fan groups which placed themselves in opposition to the Glazer takeover, working together on this campaign in the informal 'Not for Sale' coalition, had a number of objections to the proposed takeover, ranging from fear of the debt the takeover was expected to bring to the club, through to wider issues of fan democracy and ownership of culture. In an attempt to mobilise as many Manchester United fans as possible into actively opposing the takeover, the issue of debt and associated risks posed to the club's financial health was prioritised in press-releases and other public statements.

It was felt that for the campaign to appeal to the wider Manchester United fan base, only an unequivocal threat to the club's future success would be sufficient. Through the fanzines, at games, in pubs and on internet message boards many Manchester United fans continued to debate how a Glazer-owned club might affect fan culture and future opportunities for fan democracy, but it was the financial threat that remained the vanguard issue through which the 'Not For Sale' campaign would stand or fall.

Shareholders United (SU) took a leading role in putting this message across, making regular press and television statements on how the move would plunge Manchester United deep into debt and put future playing success in jeopardy (Shareholders United, 2005c). Representing a resistance tactic which many saw as the only viable way of stopping Glazer, SU managed to attract in excess of 32,000 members (supporter-shareholders in Manchester United plc) by May 2005 (Towle, 2005).

That even this impressive response failed to provide even 2% of the total shareholding in the club shows the size of the task the supporters faced in opposing the takeover via 'legitimate' financial channels (a 10% dissenting stake in the company's shares was required in order to prevent the takeover). According to United's own 2004 estimates, there were around 75 million Manchester United fans worldwide, a figure which had grown some 25 million in the preceding three years, perhaps revealing more about the qualifying criteria of being a fan than anything else.

A more realistic figure of 500,000 fans that are 'financially active' (Campbell, 2001) perhaps provides a clearer picture. This has naturally raised questions among some fans as to whether the financially-centred tactic of resistance should have been so heavily relied upon during the campaign. It has been argued that for many fans their fight to prevent the takeover was an emotional and cultural issue, and as such the battle should have been fought more explicitly on those grounds.

More direct action was certainly sought by many during the campaign, and indeed a number of high profile protests took place, led mostly by the Independent Manchester United Supporters Association (IMUSA). Protest marches were held outside United's Old Trafford ground, as well as 'flashmob' protests inside the club's 'megastore' (see autoethnographic account in Chapter 5).

Field Account: Flashmob Protest

Protests also took place in Manchester city centre, which targeted stores run by club sponsors Nike, Vodafone and Ladbrokes. These 'flashmob' protests also called in at the Manchester offices of NM Rothschild, financial advisors to the Glazer takeover bid, as detailed in this field account.

Flashmob Protest. Manchester City Centre. Saturday, 12th February 2005.

Mobile phone text messages had spread word of a 'flashmob' protest to take place in Manchester City Centre, in which the main club sponsors of Manchester United were to be targeted. The rationale centred on an understanding that the club relies on the income from such sponsors, and Glazer's projected business plans would certainly depend on at least maintaining that funding, given the financial burdens many were forecasting to accompany the huge debts the prospective new owner would bring with him.

The 'flashmob' approach had previously been used earlier in the campaign when targeting the Manchester United club shop, with the aim of sending a warning to prospective buyers that the fans had the power to disrupt their profit-making plans. The argument now continued that by

putting pressure on the club's sponsors, doubts may be raised over their continued partnership with the club should the takeover go ahead. The key was to convince the sponsors, and of course everybody else, that the fans would not 'co-operate' with the new regime, and that therefore any organisations actively supporting Glazer's ownership would be seen as 'enemies of the club' in the fans' eyes. The fans then were aiming to raise concerns amongst the sponsors over their public image, as surely no football club sponsor would wish to be viewed as working against the interests or wishes of its supporters.

Three major sponsors of the club – Nike, Vodafone and Ladbrokes – were to be targeted on this day, as all had 'branded' stores in Manchester City Centre. Text messages containing the meeting place and time were sent out late the previous evening, with instructions to wear some kind of clothing that could be used to cover the face from the scrutiny security cameras – such as hoods, scarves, balaclavas etc. Umbrellas were also suggested, as they had apparently become an essential accessory for the flashmob connoisseur, proving ideal for obscuring participants' identities when opened indoors.

I made do with a hooded coat and a scarf, and was heartened to see a healthy turnout of at least a couple of hundred when I arrived at the meeting point in what is colloquially referred to as the 'Hanging Ditch' area of Manchester's city centre. It must have been quite a menacing sight for passers by, or those sat eating breakfast in the beer garden of the pub adjacent to us, as they witnessed the growing numbers of mainly young men dressed in dark clothing stood waiting on this Saturday morning. There were enough scarves and hats, as well as small pin badges, on show to identify the group as football fans, which wouldn't have done much to lessen any anxieties onlookers may have had about our presence.

After half an hour or so of impatient waiting, a well known 'face' in

United's support gathered everyone around and directed the crowd to split into two groups and head off in opposite directions. I went with the group that headed through some back streets and onto Deansgate, before flooding into a branch of Ladbrokes bookmakers. Within a few seconds the shop was full and echoing to the now familiar chant of "United, United, not for sale". I was towards the back of the group, so could only get as far as the doorway. I could clearly see though that most of those inside had, as planned, covered their faces, and there were enough umbrellas in any case to mask most faces from the scrutiny of the security cameras. Around 10 minutes later the shop emptied as quickly as it had filled. Several fans carried with them handfuls of betting slips which they threw in the air in front of the store.

The next stop was a Nike store in St. Anne's Square, and this time I managed to get to the front of the group and took up a good position to see exactly what went on inside. The fans again belted out the 'United, United, Not For Sale' chant, but accompanying this was a more specifically-aimed song that went "We won't buy Nike, or Vodafone" to the tune of The Piranha's song 'Tom Hark'. I watched the reactions of the shop staff closely, and they remained very calm, at most looking a little embarrassed, not really knowing how to react. The young man who I presumed to be the store manager was calmly talking to some of the protesting fans, with a manner akin to that usually adopted when people are approached by drunken strangers – desperately wanting them to leave but aware that it's probably best to humour them in case they get aggressive.

The fans though remained good natured throughout, despite fears that some might take advantage of the chaotic scene by helping themselves to merchandise. One fan did get carried away and kicked a Nike-branded football out through the doors, but it was swiftly returned. Throughout the protests there was a concern often raised that fans should remember what they're campaigning for and not give the police or media the

opportunity to label them as hooligans or criminals. This was highlighted during this protest when I observed a middle-aged protester approach some younger men and ask them to refrain from drinking the cans of lager they were carrying with them.

From St. Anne's Square we walked the short distance to the Vodafone store on Market Street, where both groups converged. This was a much larger store than the other two, though whether this fact had influenced the tactic for both groups of protesters to merge into one large group was not clear. As the fans made their way towards the store entrance, the chants got louder and more vociferous as they echoed around the covered precinct area at that end of Market Street. I made my way to the far end of the store and looked back over the throngs of protestors now inside, and could see that even this large space was full, with many fans unable to get inside.

In amongst the crowd of protesting fans were a number of people who appeared to have joined the action as it had made its way through the city centre. It's impossible to wholly characterise the 'type' or profile of fan who took part in the protests, but it seemed certain that those joining in with the songs whilst carrying bags of shopping and with small children in tow hadn't originally come into town to protest against Glazer's takeover bid. It appeared then that the excitement generated by this unusual event had provided a novel distraction from the usual Saturday morning shopping, for some at least.

The focus then shifted from retail targets to more explicitly corporate ones. I'd heard mention of the fact that NM Rothschild – one of Glazer's financial advisors in his takeover dealings – had an office in Manchester, and there was talk throughout the morning that this office might also receive a visit. Sure enough, the large group walked quietly through the city centre towards a large building just off Deansgate. In the building's reception area the elderly security guard could do little else but peer out

from over his desk as hundreds of football fans, plus a handful of shoppers, filed past him and towards the lifts and stairways. Those at the very front who were leading the way appeared to know exactly which floor to go to.

When we reached the floor containing the Rothschild offices, we found it to be locked and all the lights switched off. Some commented that those inside may have received a warning from the security guard, but as it was a Saturday the chances were that it was genuinely closed that day. As the fans filed back down the staircase, a few reels of toilet paper that some had taken from the building's toilets were thrown down the vertical space around which the staircase spiralled, creating a streamer effect as it fell to the bottom floor. Deprived of the opportunity to interrupt the work of the target organisation, this seemed to reflect a desire to create at least some sort of disruption given the relative anti-climax of this particular incursion.

It was all quite surreal, to see hundreds of protesting football fans walking up and down the carpeted stairs of this plush office building, with the strains of 'United, United, not for sale' echoing from all directions. As we exited the building, the old man was still sat there very calmly behind the reception desk, smiling and nodding at those who cheekily greeted him as they passed.

The profit motive of Manchester United's potential new owners lay at the heart of this protest, with fans recognising that the public-image concerns of club sponsors were a much more viable direct target, given their commercial stature and public prominence, than the so far inaccessible Glazers. A broadening of political outlook therefore may have been developing in the collective consciousness of the protesting supporters, and this was certainly the case for myself.

Protesters also embarrassed neighbours Manchester City by 'invading' an executive meeting

of UEFA (football's European governing body) being held at the City of Manchester Stadium, in order to question the weak role they were seen to be playing as the game's guardians. On Grand National day, the biggest betting day in the British bookmakers' calendar, United fans launched a campaign of disruption against Ladbrokes that as well as 'stickering' city centre outlets with the now ubiquitous red, white and black 'Love United, Hate Glazer' stickers, also saw fans distributing thousands of fake vouchers around Manchester city centre offering free bets.

Fans involved in these various forms of protest later described feelings of elation experienced during the activities, citing the thrill of engaging in the 'civil disobedience' of disrupting everyday spaces such as shopping areas, particularly as this was done for a 'political' cause and in largely good spirits. The day of flashmobbing in Manchester city centre, which prompted the early closing of Nike and Vodafone stores, was described by one fan as *"maybe the best day I've ever had following United"* (conversation with author, 13/02/05).

All through the protests participants regularly spoke of 'the buzz', which according to some older fans served as a nostalgic throwback to bygone days of disorderly revelry while following United. This suggests an experience close to what Victor Turner referred to as 'liminal' out-of-time moments, which occur when people take part in activities that represent a break from everyday, relatively mundane 'real life' (Turner, 1969), and which many fans sought to restore to their match-day experience.

Such a temporary reaction, while significant, is of course a long way from the more permanent changes required for wider political engagement. As alluded to earlier, football fans have traditionally engaged in activities that are said to produce such 'altered states' of mind, and English football culture's apolitical character highlights the lack of any automatic causal link there. Most literature on football hooliganism has tended to highlight the temporary 'escapism' enjoyed in such experiences, rather than the adoption of any newly-found 'political' perspectives (Elias and Dunning, 1986; Dunning et al., 2002).

Many fans involved in the protests may have experienced just such a temporary 'thrill' from the events, thereby continuing unaffected once the immediate activities were over, their zeal for the campaign not significantly intensified in any lasting sense. Many participants though have spoken not only of the above kind of experiences, but also a strengthening of bonds

between them and fellow campaigners. The deeper engagement with the immediate goals of the campaign this naturally brought was significant, as well as what some spoke of as a wish to maintain the feelings generated between campaigners once the campaign was over (author's conversation with FC United steering group member, 18th June 2005).

The same processes have been described in social movement literature, whereby for instance Gareth Dale writes of an initial trepidation amongst isolated protesters who through the processes of mobilisation and collective action were able to experience *"empowerment through solidarity"* (Dale, 1996: 97). A campaign can therefore be seen as acting as a 'sorting house', in which *"differences can be negotiated and points of contact and solidarity developed into more durable unities"* (Johnson 1996: 167). Similarly, Rick Fantasia reported that it didn't often take long for *"protest norms"* to appear amongst the American workers he studied, so that rather than actions being seen as isolated gestures, participants started to relish the idea of continuing protest. He reports protesting workers chanting a message to bosses of *"we'll be back again next Monday!"* (Fantasia, 1988: 97).

Likewise, as Manchester United's 'flashmob' was leaving the Vodafone store in Manchester City Centre in February 2005, and again at a later protest which disrupted Ladbrokes bookmakers on Grand National Day, protesters sang defiantly *"We can do this every* week" (author's field notes, 08/04/06), in a clear message aimed at convincing United's sponsors that were they to continue their financial backing of United under Glazer's ownership, fans would continue to turn out for similar action. The 'cultures of solidarity' (Fantasia, 1988) fostered during these and other protests has been regularly cited by fans as a key driving force behind the desire to make FC United a reality despite many misgivings.

As already made clear by those closely involved, The 'Not For Sale' campaign had been run as a coalition of different supporter groups with often diverse and occasionally contradictory broader aims. Each one agreed that the Glazer takeover should be opposed by all supporters, but the methods of opposition varied quite markedly. IMUSA, Shareholders United and to some extent the fanzines faced constraints in terms of the nature of the actions taken in their name, particularly as relationships with the press, contacts in the club and the interest taken by the police in the protests was a concern for these relatively high-profile and therefore accountable organisations. This wasn't however the case for all organisations that fought against the Glazer takeover.

By Any Means Necessary: Manchester Education Committee

More clandestine actions were undertaken by the shadowy Manchester Education Committee (MEC), a less formal organisation which used more threatening language in their communications. The group first sprung to the media's attention in February 2004 when they interrupted a horse race at Hereford racecourse in a protest aimed at defending the club, and manager Alex Ferguson, against what was seen as a destabilising campaign by Irish horse-racing magnates, and then Manchester United majority shareholders, JP McManus and John Magnier.

The pair, who run the powerful and successful 'Coolmore' breeding company, had been in bitter dispute with the Manchester United manager over the complex ownership rights each claimed over the valuable racehorse Rock of Gibraltar. The pair had been encouraged to take a financial stake in the club by Ferguson, who had befriended the pair as he developed an increasing interest in horse racing. It was speculated that the United manager hoped to shore up his influence at the club by bringing trusted friends on board, but when that friendship turned to animosity Ferguson found his position being undermined.

By using their financial stakeholding in the club, gained via their 'Cubic Expression' investment company - and which had climbed to just short of the 30% threshold which would necessitate a formal takeover bid[12] - to ask questions about some of the club's business dealings, and in so doing raise doubts over Ferguson's conduct, Magnier and McManus managed to destabilise the running of Manchester United. The aim was widely believed to be to put pressure on Ferguson to drop his dispute with Coolmore, with an ultimate threat looming of the duo gaining overall ownership of the club.

The Manchester Education Committee aimed to put a different kind of pressure on Coolmore, stating that they would employ any tactics necessary to defend Manchester United against those they saw as a threat to the club. After disrupting a race at Hereford racecourse in which one of the horses, Majestic Moonbeam, was owned by the Irish pair, the MEC released a statement explaining their actions, which they labelled 'Operation Moonbeam': *"when Coolmore deliberately allow this dispute to publicly infringe upon and undermine the running of MUFC, as has happened in recent weeks, the MEC will resort to*

[12] The London Stock Exchange's Takeover Panel rules at that time required that when a single investor's shareholding reaches 30% of the total shareholding of a public limited company (Plc), a formal offer to purchase the remainder of the shares must be made to other shareholders.

any means necessary in revenge" (Manchester Education Committee press release, 06/02/04).

The statement went on to warn that in taking what they felt were relatively measured and 'legitimate' actions, it had been necessary to *"contain sections of Manchester United's support advocating more drastic measures. Any rash moves undertaken by Coolmore in the wake of today's protest could well provoke these factions into unilateral action and the MEC would accept no responsibility for what may occur"* (Manchester Education Committee press release, 06/02/04).

The widely condemned actions and rhetoric of the MEC did have the effect however of showing a united front between Ferguson and the fans, and it was later hoped that this would be reciprocated by the manager in the fans' attempts to prevent the club being taken over (Manchester Evening News, 2005c). Ferguson eventually relented in his horse dispute, and his explicit support for the subsequent Glazer takeover was seen by many as directly related to his dispute with Magnier and McManus. Many fans felt that Ferguson had allowed his personal business dealings to impinge too heavily on the club, first of all by encouraging Coolmore to buy shares, then by responding to the pressure they had exerted on him by supporting the alternative takeover bid by Glazer.

Seeking to reassert his authority at Manchester United, it seemed that Ferguson was determined not to reveal any wounds from his public spat with Magnier and McManus. Once Glazer had announced the purchase of Cubic Expression's shareholding to add to his existing 14% stake, the takeover bid was officially set in motion. Once that process was complete, Ferguson ensured that he was seen to be working with, rather than against, his new boss: *"Let's welcome them to Manchester United and show them what is so special about the club they have bought and what makes Old Trafford such a truly electric place"* (Manchester Evening News, 2005c). So rather than reciprocating the fans' show of support during the Coolmore saga, Ferguson instead gave his public support to the unpopular new Glazer regime.

Anti-Glazer: Anti-American?

Throughout the supporters' campaign, the nationality of Malcolm Glazer was constantly cited, which led many to suggest that the supporters were acting out of anti-American sentiment. This was certainly a criticism of many US-based Manchester United supporters

during debates on internet message boards, such as the fan cited in Chapter 6 who claimed "*I know why you guys are so pissed. It's because the guy is American"*. Similar sentiments arose during a debate amongst FC United supporters some years later, though as the analysis in Chapter 8 suggests, that discourse had a more explicit politically character.

Glazer's spokesman Bob Leffler went as far to accuse campaigning United fans of xenophobia: *"the only reason they hate Glazer – if they hate him – is xenophobia and fear of the unknown. It's not logic"* before going on to reveal a remarkable lack of understanding about the sensibilities of the fans by stating *"our job is to change that, to show that this is a true sportsman who will run your franchise like it should be run and win championships"* (Manchester Evening News, 2004b).

While this accusation was quickly dismissed by campaign groups (Guardian online, 10/12/04), the anti-American angle had no doubt been given weight by the attempted burning of an American flag during a protest two months previously. Immediately after Glazer had first launched his takeover bid, the MEC invaded the pitch during a Manchester United reserve match at Altrincham FC, which was being televised live on United's in-house television station MUTV. Dressed all in black and wearing balaclavas, the group of sinister-looking protesters walked across the pitch carrying - apart from the sacrificial American flag - a large banner bearing the slogan 'Not For Sale' (Manchester Evening News, 2004a).

As previously discussed, Merrett (2001) has critiqued the 'lazy' assertion often enthusiastically grasped by defenders of neoliberalism that local opposition to many globally-framed transformations are parochial or fundamentalist in their local identifications. As clarified by former IMUSA Chair Jules Spencer, *"it wouldn't have mattered if he was from Stretford, that wasn't an issue"* (author's interview, 25/06/11).

The MEC, in their attempt to add more bite to the campaign, went on to target other prominent events and individuals, working to the rationale that "*United must be safeguarded. It is our club, and we will be ruthless in protecting it. Our previous symbolic actions have been disregarded; we have no choice now but to act with our full capabilities"* (Manchester Education Committee Press Release, 08/02/05).

Setting the campaign within a wider context of ordinary supporters' interests having been sacrificed *"at the altar of commercialism"*, the MEC warned that those who continued to

ignore fans' interests would be 'legitimate targets' and that *"we intend to initiate a civil war effectively setting the football club - the supporters - against the company"*, thus rendering Manchester United 'ungovernable' (Manchester Education committee Press Release, 07/10/04). References here to commercialism and an understanding that that the fans *are* the 'football club', and thus separate from 'the company', reflect explicitly the dominant paradigm in which United's independent supporter culture had developed over the preceding decade and more, and which would be maintained once the takeover by Glazer went ahead.

Once Glazer had bought a controlling stake in Manchester United Plc, protesting fans were left with serious decisions to make. Whether to read literally, and personally, the 'Stand up, if you're not for sale' chants that had become a staple of United matches the previous season, or whether to continue going to matches in order to 'fight from within', even though it would mean financially supporting Glazer's ownership.

Field Account: Public Meeting

What follows is an auto-ethnographic account of my own thoughts, feelings and interpretations at this crucial juncture in the 'Not For Sale' campaign, and as it turned out, in my own experience of being a Manchester United supporter. The style of writing in this account is one of personal, reflexive narrative, and is the result chiefly of observations and thoughts recorded on the night of a pivotal public meeting of Manchester United fans. As reflected upon in Chapter 5, field notes were written up shortly after the meeting and account for the past tense used to reflect on some of the observations made. There is also considerable reflection of my dual role as researcher and participant, which speaks to some the methodological context covered in Chapters 4 and 5.

19th May 2005 - Public Meeting, Methodist Hall, Oldham Street, Manchester

(One week after takeover, three days before FA Cup Final)

What is to be done? It's a week since Glazer announced he'd bought Coolmore's shares, giving him more than 30% of the club and meaning a formal offer for all remaining shares had to follow. I'd spent an unhealthy amount of time reading different analyses of what was likely to happen next, most of which were overly-laden with economic jargon and impenetrable statistics.

SU still seemed to think that they could muster up enough shareholding support to block the takeover. They'd made it clear that a 10% dissenting stake would be enough to at least stall the takeover with some kind of appeal process, but no one seemed able or willing to announce how many they had at the moment.

They released a statement saying it was just as important that they gather together a high number of individual shareholders who oppose the takeover, even in the event of not reaching that 10% mark. This was confusing - would 50,000 individual shareholders with an aggregate shareholding of 5% of the company be as effective as 500 shareholders with 10% between them?

I quite liked the idea of being a 'dissenting shareholder'. I was imagining scenarios of some kind of stock exchange commission or hearing packed full of fans debating whether the takeover would in the club's best interests, with Glazer eventually backing down in the face of these awkward small shareholders refusing to 'play ball'. Apart from SU's continued optimism though, all reports were presenting the takeover as a done deal, with only the merest of formalities to be completed before our club was in Glazer's hands.

Later it would turn out that SU's collective stake never reached even 2% of the total shareholding of Manchester United PLC. No wonder they kept that quiet, though I'm sure it was for tactical reasons with the best intentions of keeping hope alive, rather than anything scurrilous about maintaining their own credibility, as some would suggest. As an individual supporter though, what could I do?

With a marvellous sense of timing, I'd posted my season ticket renewal application on the 11th May, the day before the takeover was announced. As talk of boycotts ensued, I dropped this fact of ironic fate into

conversations with match-going mates with something akin to shrugged shoulders, as if to suggest any decision was obviously now out of my hands. If I'm honest I hadn't up until this point given too much thought to what I'd do if Glazer bought the club, although I did kind of relish a fans' backlash, imagining all manner of disruption at the following season's games - obviously there'd be chants and banners expressing our feelings, and maybe even pitch invasions and other protests such as individual match boycotts. So initially I was of the mind that whatever protests were to follow would include the disruption of Manchester United match-days, part of what would later be mockingly referred to as the mythical 'fight from within'.

I found out that there was a 'cooling off period' built in to the season ticket 'contract' in which fans could change their minds, as long as it was put in writing by the following week. I was back on the hook, with a decision to make. Had I not already posted my application, the decision making process would have had a very different slant. Posting the renewal form once I knew the campaign was defeated would have been an active act of surrender. The fact however that I renewed before the takeover was announced, meant that at the time I posted the renewal it hadn't even registered as a potential betrayal of all the energy we had put in to the campaign.

On the flip side however, having in reality prematurely sent the application, it seemed an even bigger decision to actively withdraw my application than would have been the case had I just not sent it. I knew though that I still had a decision to make, although the thought of not having a season ticket seemed so 'wrong' to me that I was quite comfortable with the fact that my application was 'in'. As intimated above, this fact acted to smooth the way for inaction, as it now seemed so much easier to take the path of least resistance by passively letting the season ticket 'cooling off period' lapse.

I was looking forward to this public meeting, mainly because I hadn't had much chance to speak to anyone in any depth about what the takeover meant, for the club, the fans and for me. I hadn't been to a match since it happened, missing the last league game of the season, Southampton away, for financial reasons, so hadn't seen my usual match-going mates. I watched that Southampton game in a pub in South Manchester, hoping to see some sign of the protest that was planned from the fans in attendance. That nothing happened was a huge disappointment, but also a telling sign of things to come.

None of my usual match-going friends were interested in attending this meeting, but I had arranged to meet up with another United-supporting mate who had attended IMUSA meetings in the past and seemed fairly engaged in the campaign whenever we spoke. As I was leaving the chip shop on Oldham Street just before the meeting was due to start, he phoned me saying he'd only just finished work, was still in his overalls and hadn't had any tea, so would have to give it a miss.

I couldn't understand how other United fans could choose to miss events such as this. For me, this was what it was all about - at this point in the club's history, a public meeting in which fans would thrash out how they planned to oppose what we saw as a threat to our future. This for me was much more important than any match. I knew from experience that my mates would never miss an important match for what would be considered respective trivialities, like eating. So why they weren't similarly concerned with events like this was baffling to me. How could they bear to miss a meeting which might determine the future of the club? I knew really that the simple answer was that they didn't think such matters as ownership and fan democracy to be very important in determining the club's future at all.

There had been certain big matches that I'd missed in the past - European away games against Montpellier and Juventus that I still regret

not making more effort to get to, and Chelsea away when Cantona scored his first goal for United was missed for the feeble reason that I felt obliged to attend a work's Christmas party. One of my friends missed the 1999 European Cup Final in Barcelona because he had exams that week, which is still such a sore subject for him that no one dares mention the game in his company, or the week away we all had on the Costa Brava.

As I mulled this over, I started to wonder how many people throughout history had missed major events for what are in hindsight relatively trivial reasons. There may have been people who stayed at home when Martin Luther King delivered his 'I have a dream' speech because they had to do the gardening, or perhaps when the Sex Pistols played at Manchester's Lesser Free Trade Hall in 1977, a promising young musician may have missed out on the now famously seminal gig because he had homework.

As shallow as it may sound, such thoughts were liable to prove a motivating factor for me whenever public meetings, rallies and other events took place. The fear of missing out on something important was always there, ready to come to the fore in case I considered letting other things get in the way. These thoughts brought with them a pang of guilt, in that I felt I shouldn't be imagining my future self smugly boasting "I was there", as it served to cast some doubt on my authenticity, that if just 'being there' was my prime motivation then how much did the cause of the event really mean to me?

Does a self-conscious recognition of yourself as part of an unfolding history invalidate or lessen your credible participation in these events? If so, what does this mean for my simultaneous role as researcher? Being a critical researcher necessitates a more reflective perspective while observing and participating at such events, so recognising my role as an active historical agent is surely something to embrace if such a view of the world is to be maintained consistently.

Likewise, when critical researchers seek empowerment for the social actors they are studying, they talk of the need for a more agentic perspective in which people see that they themselves can make a difference with their actions, giving them a sense of power and responsibility by fostering a broader, social and historical, cause-and-effect way of seeing their place in the world. Without such a reflective approach, how could my 'participant self' make decisions based upon a desire for a more positive future?

Even while immersed as an active participant then, with all the researcher's methodological baggage temporarily out of sight, there were still conflicts between what I saw as some kind of ideal, caught-in-the-moment, authentic participation and the colder, almost calculated desire to witness goings on via some kind of 'tourist gaze'.

So while I did get caught up in the emotion of the various activities in which I participated, there was always a tendency to indulgently move outside of myself, and to see myself, there, in the midst of an event in history. This is the case even without the added layer of reflexivity that the role of researcher brings, although the similarities and overlaps between the more aloof aspect of my 'participant self' and my 'researcher self' are clear. During the course of the research they have both fed off each other, nurturing I feel a healthy critical consistency as both participant and researcher. With this in mind, it can be said that in recognising the presence of that tendency to 'step outside' of myself as a social actor, we can see something that more than anything else justifies, perhaps ironically, the more engaged approach I have taken as a researcher.

A self-conscious concern just 'to be there' is the mark of the inauthentic 'new fan'. Like the millions of Englishmen who say they 'were there' when England won the 1966 World Cup, and the ubiquitous 'gloryhunters' that

make it so hard for loyal fans to get tickets for big matches, the football tourist is ridiculed by those who see themselves as traditional, 'real' supporters. Authentic fandom then is seen to be about getting so carried away in your emotions that you cede any self-awareness to the greater common concern for supporting the team. This is why fans taking photos or videos at crucial moments, especially as happens more often in recent years via mobile phones, are mocked as inauthentic by those who see themselves as more genuine fans.

Likewise, the recent transformation of football grounds has created another spectacle of self-consciousness within which many 'tourist fans' revel. Particularly prevalent at major international tournaments, huge video screens regularly display close-ups of fans throughout the game. Although some fans nervously smile or awkwardly try to 'not notice' when they are displayed for everyone to see, the usual reaction is to wave like a stricken shipwreck survivor, so eager are they to be spotted during what is likely to be a mere fleeting sweep of the spotlight.

Amazing transformations can take place during these brief moments of fame, so that fans who initially appear to be so caught up in the moment that all their hopes and dreams rest on the game's outcome, upon noticing themselves on the big screen will generally, often following a friendly tap on the shoulder from a nearby fan to inform them of their newly acquired public status, seem to forget all about what seconds ago appeared as the be-all and end-all of their consciousness. For this all-too brief moment they're on the big screen at this big event, for all their friends and family at home to see, before of course realising that they're waving at the screen and not the camera, just as its attention shifts back to the on-pitch matters which so engulfed their senses moments ago.

These cultural concerns over cultural authenticity, however fleeting, represent an inverse version of initial doubts over my objectivity as a researcher. So while I originally had misgivings about being too

'immersed' in the research field, at times I also managed to take myself to task about not being engaged enough as a participant.

In the process of reconciling my roles as both critical researcher and active participant however, the importance of positioning oneself as a historically-situated social actor has won through. By accepting an ultimate aim of not just being carried along by, or sitting aloof from, the unravelling of history, but of actively doing something to help forge the future I want to see, it has been possible to accept and relish an ability to 'step outside of myself' to see my actions as part of a bigger picture, without losing the authenticity of an active participant in cultural events, nor the credibility of a critically, engaged researcher observing these events.

Back 'there' on Manchester's Oldham Street, I climbed the steps of the Methodist Hall and took my seat towards the back of the hall. I looked around and spotted a lot of faces I recognised from away games or from the protests, but none that I felt close enough to sit next to. By the time the meeting was due to start I couldn't see any spare seats and still people were arriving. I knew there were also seats on the upper balcony, but from where I was I couldn't see whether that was also full, though I had to presume so as people were now seeking out places to stand around the edges of the hall.

On the main stage was a long table, behind which were sat a dozen or so people who were about to be introduced as representatives of the main fanzines and independent fan groups. I recognised most of them, mainly from matches and protests, but also some of them from IMUSA meetings and some volunteer work I'd previously done in the SU offices. Behind the table was hung a large banner, designed in the style of a red and black Cuban flag bearing the slogan 'Hasta La Victoria Siempre'. The chair of the meeting would later refer to the relevance of the slogan, which he translated as "Onwards, Always To Victory".

With a notion of the significance the meeting may have for my research, I took along a notepad and pen with which to record relevant comments, thoughts and observations from the evening, but was so caught up in the proceedings that I couldn't bring myself to take adequate notes for fear of missing what was being said next. I also felt very self-conscious while scribbling away, as I felt this made me look to other fans as somehow more detached from what was going on, not really part of it, just an interested observer - perhaps they'd think I was a journalist. That's how it made me feel anyway, like an outsider or interloper when all I wanted to do was take in as much of the evening as possible without the distraction of writing. At that stage of the research, the focus was quite different to what it later became, so retrospectively I can see that it's quite likely that any observations or quotes I would have noted wouldn't in any case have been directly relevant to the main thrust of the research as it developed.

There have been subsequent public meetings at which I've volunteered to help organise things, and those experiences have taught me that being distracted by such 'duties' tends to leave me feeling somehow disengaged from events. With the benefit of hindsight therefore, I'm quite sure that taking on a more passive role as 'note taker' rather than a more engaged participant at this pivotal public meeting would have been detrimental to the overall research process, not least because it could have interfered with (what has turned out to be) 'the natural course of events' in my development as a football supporter and in my outlook generally.

While traditional or positivist research paradigms would recoil at the thought of a researcher interfering with the field under observation, I feel very uneasy at the idea of allowing a temporary aloofness while observing from an emotional distance to potentially prevent me from 'getting carried away' with the tide of emotions, as was experienced that

night. The important point of recognition for me was that the research process has played an important role in the development of what I see as a more enlightened perspective, as a result of reading, thinking, discussing, teaching, debating and writing, while also being caught up in the cultural turmoil of this time.

My memories of the meeting are primarily those which I feel defined that short period of time following 12th May 2005, during which so much was still 'up in the air', and the thousands of individual decisions made by supporters during that time that did so much to shape the landscape of independent supporter culture at Manchester United. Following various pronouncements and statements of the position the campaign was in, comments and questions were invited from the floor. This is where I first started to seriously question whether renewing my season ticket was the right thing to do.

An analogy had been used by one of the speakers on the top table, someone who had been prominent within IMUSA in particular. The analogy was the same one used by Leon Trotsky in 1931 when he described the crucial choices faced by people in Germany as powers on the right and the left struggled for supremacy. The analogy used was that of a sphere resting on the top of a pyramid, and he explained that while it's clear that at some point it will fall, we still don't know which way that will be. It was therefore up to us to do whatever we can to ensure it falls our way. So the message was clear, our decisions were still important and there was still something to aim for, despite the seeming certainty of Glazer's purchase of the club. What followed was an evening of passionate reflection and debate, in which everyone agreed that the campaign against Glazer should continue, though whether or not this should take the form of a boycott was the crucial issue at stake[13].

Elements of the evening bore resemblance to the much clichéd 'alcoholics

[13] See Appendix 3 for different ways in which fans were encouraged to 'fight Glazer'.

anonymous' meetings, such was the outpouring of reflective introspection, with individuals stepping forward and telling their story, before stating that they'd had enough and something now had to change, after which they'd sit back down to a round of applause. One fan in particular stands out from that night, explaining how his match-going support for United was part of a family lineage which had seen generation after generation take that cherished place at Old Trafford. Following a heartfelt explanation of what he saw as the problems afflicting his support for United in recent years (lack of atmosphere, mates 'dropping off' one by one, price increases, commercialisation, defeat in this campaign), he finally said *"I've been goin' United for over thirty years, an' I can't imagine not going, but I can't. I'm gonna do it, I wasn't sure before, but after listening to everyone tonight, that's it, I'm gonna do it, I'm givin' it up", before following up "it actually feels good to have finally made my mind up, I've been in bits since last week, but now it's like a weight off my shoulders"* (author's field notes written that night from personal memory). About ten minutes later he stood back up and asked if anyone had found his wedding ring, which had come off during one of his passionate gesticulations earlier. It seemed that going home without his wedding ring and his season ticket would be a bit too much for one night.

I too was getting carried away with the emotion of the evening, and was probably for the first time seriously thinking that the right thing would be to give up my season ticket and join the boycott. I was even thinking about standing up and announcing it, as at least that way it would be harder to change my mind in the colder light of the next morning. A million thoughts were racing through my mind, about friends from the match, about how strange and terrible it would be not to go to United, but also about how liberated I'd felt stood outside Old Trafford while protesting during the Arsenal game the previous October, and how I felt a closeness to others who had been involved with me at various protests.

More than anything though, when I put myself in that place, alongside all the other fans who had stated their intention to boycott, I felt good about myself, like I was doing the right thing. I felt as if I'd have to subdue constant feelings of guilt and self-loathing if I were to take the path of least resistance by allowing my renewal application to be processed.

Just as I was trying to get used to the idea of giving it up, a well-known figure within United's support took the microphone. This was one of those larger-than-life characters that most clubs seem to have, almost a cult-figure that had carved a popular image as United's 'songsmith' over the previous fifteen years or so. He could regularly be seen at home and away matches, and in Europe, leading United fans in song, surrounded as he usually was by a devoted entourage. He had a column in one of the fanzines and also put his name to a bus service which ran to United away games.

He had even released recordings of his songs which fans bought when he appeared before games in pubs close to the ground, and had recently been on a singing tour of Ireland and Scandinavia, entertaining locally-based United fans desperate to experience what they saw as part of an authentic, Mancunian, Manchester United match culture. During the anti-takeover campaign, he had often been pictured at the front of demonstrations, taking up prominent positions behind the 'Not For Sale' and 'No Customers: No Profits' banners. During the flashmobs in the city centre, he had seemed to be one of the ringleaders, directing fans towards certain locations while liaising with others via his mobile phone, and of course leading the fans in song.

I was surprised to hear him state that despite agreeing with all the sentiments of the night and the campaign in general, he wouldn't be giving up his season ticket. He said that he *"loved United too much to leave"*, no matter how much he hated Glazer. It soon became evident that my state of mind was fairly fragile, as this fan's impassioned speech

received a warm welcome within my fickle mindset, finally providing as it did a counter-argument which sat more easily with my usual outlook. Even after my conscience had been pricked time and again throughout the evening, to the extent that I'd all but decided that boycotting was the right thing to do, all it took was a single 'voice of reason' to bring me back to my senses, ready to get on with supporting United as I'd done for so long before.

The evening's proceedings drew to a close shortly after this interjection, although not before provisional plans for a follow-up meeting were announced - amongst other things to discuss the possibility of setting up a supporter-run football club, which had been purposely left off the agenda this night. I slunk off back down Oldham Street and through Piccadilly Gardens to catch my bus home, and as I was walking towards the bus stop I realised I was in some sense back to the same mindset as when walking in the opposite direction earlier that evening - confused, heavy hearted and needing to talk about it more before I could decide. I hadn't forgotten though how relieved and positive I'd felt for that brief period during the meeting when I thought I'd decided to boycott.

Campaign Tactics: A Retrospective Critique

Yes, no, maybe
I don't know
Can you repeat the question?

from 'Boss of Me' by They Might Be Giants

The leveraged nature of the borrowing that Glazer required to fund his bid meant that there were real financial threats to the club's future. The debt would be transferred to the club once the takeover went through, making repayments on this debt a priority for the foreseeable future. This aspect of the takeover attempt, and specifically the fact that it would transform the world's most commercially successful football club into a club deeply in debt, meant that the financial benefits that were usually seen as accompanying takeovers of football clubs,

could not in this case be used as a ‘sweetener’ for fans.

Glazer’s business acumen was inevitably trumpeted as being of potential benefit for the club, as his input had after all transformed the on-field fortunes of his American Football franchise Tampa Bay Buccaneers, at least initially. The financial risks Glazer’s plans – leaked to the press in the build up to the takeover – threatened to bring to Manchester United gave the protesting fans, and the sensation-hungry media, almost a free-run in terms of shaping public perception of the takeover bid.

It seemed almost everyone agreed that Glazer’s takeover would be detrimental to the club, with most commentators (including financial experts) strongly questioning the move even from the perspective of Glazer’s financial interests. It was widely felt that even within the constraints of public accountability brought by being a Plc, Manchester United had been commercially exploited very efficiently, leaving little room for improvement (Shareholders United, 2005).

This of course led to speculation on which areas of the club’s income could be exploited further by Glazer, especially as Manchester United’s turnover would need to be increased dramatically even to meet the expected debt repayments. Press reports fuelled speculation of dystopian scenarios in which the cultural fears of a corporate, 'Americanised' or ‘Disneyfied’ (Zukin, 1995) future awaited the club. It was suggested that projected debt repayments would prompt the Glazers to sell star players and even Old Trafford to raise income, prompting various internet wags, as well as Shareholders United (2005c), to circulate ‘photoshopped’ images of the stadium decked out in American corporate branding.

As touched upon earlier, the ‘Not For Sale’ campaign’s reliance on invoking fears of future financial meltdown in order to elicit more resistance amongst the wider Manchester United support, has been the subject of some criticism from many who were close to the campaign. As well as the huge task involved in attempting to gain the 10% ‘blocking stake’ in the club, some fans felt that the reasoning behind the campaign was too focused on a perceived threat to playing success and being able to attract star players, rather than threats to match day culture and fan democracy.

Jules Spencer, who was IMUSA Chair at the time, feels that while that *“message did resonate”* and so captured the imagination of a wider range of United fans than any other

previous campaign, in retrospect perhaps a more powerful message might have been to emphasise the fact that *"it would be the fans that would be buying the club for him"* and he therefore regrets that they weren't able to more successfully *"paint that picture"* during the campaign (author's interview, 25/06/11).

It was however understood and widely agreed at the time within the 'Not For Sale' coalition that a more straightforward debt issue linked to the club's future financial stability would garner more support for the campaign amongst the club's wider fan base, but it was only following the takeover that this tactic's failings became clearer. Brown (2007) notes that the failings of the campaign can be put down to the rationale that underpinned Shareholders United's share-buying tactic, mainly due to the huge value of the Manchester United company. SU never came close to even achieving a minority nuisance stake, let alone one big enough to block the bid.

This issue caused some disquiet on SU's own online message board, as eager fans sought to discover how close SU's supporter-pledged stake was to the 10% stake needed to prevent a compulsory buy-out. The silence from SU on this was, in hindsight, deafening in its symbolism for the campaign's ultimate failings. So much rested on convincing United's worldwide fanbase that they were capable together of preventing the takeover, that perhaps with good reason, the true scale of the task was never accurately portrayed publicly.

That so much rested on the argument that Manchester United would inevitably suffer under Glazer's ownership, is certainly a key reason why protests have died down significantly since the takeover. No visible deterioration in Manchester United's playing fortunes has been evident following the takeover, meaning that for most, the prime argument of the 'Not for Sale' campaign has been largely negated. The fact that dire consequences may still be lying in store as future debt repayments mount is still a central argument of SU (now reformed as Manchester United Supporters Trust), but for most fans such arguments are now merely seen as scaremongering or 'crying wolf'.

The failed tactics employed in the 'Not For Sale' campaign can be viewed as falling within what Zygmunt Bauman describes as a *"technical game of efficiency versus inefficiency"* (Blackshaw, 2008: 131). This is seen to be a defining feature of 'liquid modernity' – Bauman's description of what he views as *"a second bout of deregulation-cum-individualisation"* - in that what Francois Lyotard called *'performativity'* has now become

"the new criterion of legitimacy" (cited in Blackshaw, 2005: 137).

What Bauman has therefore recognised is an increasing tendency to judge everything by its efficiency – basically, whether or not it will work. Wars are therefore judged increasingly on whether 'we' are winning and how much they cost, rather than whether 'we' should be fighting at all. In the neoliberal world of the free market, this means the value of everything is being stripped down to its market expediency. So when the protesting Manchester United fans were weighing up how best to approach their campaign to engage fellow supporters in resisting Glazer's takeover, a judgement was made which prioritised the financially viability of the takeover above considerations of cultural or social value.

This was the fairly pragmatic choice, reflected in Shareholders United becoming the prominent public face of the campaign. Duncan Drasdo, the Chief Executive of Shareholders United, feels that this was the 'natural role' for his organisation due to its more *"concrete plan"* of buying shares, as opposed to the more ephemeral cultural notions and less conventional tactics more associated with other organisations. Drasdo does acknowledge that a big problem with their campaign was the lack of any plan for failure, claiming that there just wasn't enough time to put any other ideas into practice (Author's interview 05/12/07).

In order then to challenge the collective apathy of the wider Manchester United fan base, it was decided that they needed to be convinced that the financial 'performance' of the club would be likely to suffer if Glazer's bid were successful. By publicly stating that Manchester United fans were opposed to the takeover because the prospective new owners' business plan just 'won't work', they were in effect relegating fans' more politicised concerns over social and cultural implications to the back burner.

Apart from implying or assuming that Manchester United fans' prime concern was maintaining their club's position as one of the world most financially successful football clubs, this tactic ensured that the campaign moved out of their hands because it relied on evidence of the club's impending or actual financial failure making itself available. All SU had to go on was speculation derived from pessimistic market forecasts of the club's and the industry's future potential, which can easily enough be refuted - as they were - by more optimistic forecasts.

Aside from the probability that most fans wouldn't be sufficiently engaged to attempt a

penetrative examination of the range of competing and contradictory jargon-heavy economic reports that were available in the public domain, this approach also failed to account for an equally pragmatic, somewhat ambivalent reaction from most United fans on the issue, summed up by the subsequent mocking of these more apathetic supporters as the ‘wait and see brigade’.

The failure of well researched, convincingly argued information to have the desired impact against powerful interests perhaps shouldn't be such a surprise in an age that Jodi Dean describes as one of 'Communicative Capitalism', in which such messages become just one of a bewildering array of messages – all billed as 'equal' in an age of internet-inspired democratic optimism – that Dean feels ultimately serve to disengage most people rather than inspire action (Dean, 2009). In this context, it is not hard to see that even a relatively well organised campaign, involving all manner of experts and analysts to present the 'true' dismaying picture of Glazer's plans, doesn't require much beyond a retort of 'we disagree with you' to leave the powerful comfortably in the driving seat, and onlookers feeling powerless to do anything but 'wait and see'.

So most fans did wait, and what they would come to see - following a relatively disappointing first season under the Glazer regime - was an impressive haul of trophies, all achieved by playing exciting, attractive football. Star players had been retained, and new ones had arrived, so those who decided to ‘wait and see’ did not have much immediate cause to regret their decision. Paul Simpson for instance, of Marketing Manchester, during an 'International Power Breakfast' in Tampa, organised in an attempt to 'align' business relationships between the two cities on the back of the Glazer deal, reported what most other observers could see: *“The horror stories we have heard about the Glazers certainly haven't come to fruition”* (Tampa Bay Business Journal, 31/08/05).

By choosing ‘economic feasibility’ ahead of ‘cultural values’ as the spearhead of the Not For Sale campaign, it was accepted that the rules of the market would take precedence over the cultural concerns in which many had invested so much over the previous decade and more of organising themselves independently. Once the takeover went ahead, these rules of the market meant that there was nothing more fans could do except withhold their custom, but this would mean rescuing the cultural arguments from the back-burner of the public campaign. By this time it was too late for the majority who had opposed the takeover, as the cultural implications did not any more feature explicitly at the forefront of their concerns.

Asking fans at this point to ‘boycott’ because the club ‘might not be financially successful’ would be to vastly underestimate how much emotional and cultural values tower over such pragmatic concerns in the minds of football supporters. Had the campaign been fought explicitly on more cultural arguments of identity, democracy and authenticity then perhaps in the face of the takeover going ahead, even with fewer number, fans may have felt more empowered to continue in a cultural resistance, though of course we can only speculate on this.

So rather than coming out of the campaign feeling that the outcome had been ethically and morally unjust according to their strong cultural values, most fans emerged resigned to the fact that they had been defeated fair and square in a game played out to the rules of the free market. The legitimacy of the outcome (Glazer's takeover going ahead) was therefore secured once the ‘official’ campaign rhetoric adopted qualifying criteria based on Lyotard's notion of ‘performativity’ rather than on more ethical or cultural concerns (Blackshaw, 2005).

Defeated and heavy hearted, but crucially as a result of fighting a campaign based on 'technical efficiency' rather than cultural or political principle, most United fans emerged with their cultural values relatively unruffled in any explicit sense and feeling powerless to change anything, so naturally carried on as they knew best by renewing season tickets or memberships and supporting their team as they always had done.

Of course, a significant number of fans did choose to boycott, and it is telling that their reasons for boycotting tend ultimately to be ones of culture and principle rather than more narrow concerns over ‘the debt’ and the efficient running of the club’s business, even if this financial rationale still occasionally provides ammunition for some against the Glazer regime. These fans then had not allowed their struggle to be reduced to arguments about how well the club would perform (on or off the pitch), as for them this was always secondary to their deeply ingrained cultural values which placed notions of loyalty, identity and authenticity above all else, including on-pitch success and being there to see it. These concerns however - if not before - had now been bolstered by principles of a social and political nature, which placed ideas of ownership and democracy above those of blind loyalty and deference.

No More Heroes

Manchester United manager Alex Ferguson played an important role in some fans' changing perceptions of their relationship with 'the club'. Until this time seen as a champion of fan democracy, Ferguson had actively supported independent fan campaigns, appearing at IMUSA events and even putting his name to the Shareholders United cause, encouraging fans to *"get involved"* (Shareholders United, 2005a). In the foreword to a book produced by the national fan-democracy lobby Supporters Direct, Ferguson explicitly gives his backing to the idea of fan ownership (Hamil et al., 2000).

Ferguson remained uncharacteristically silent during the pivotal months of the takeover campaign, only surfacing once the new owners were firmly in place to publicly back his new boss. Many supporters now therefore see Ferguson as having turned his back on them, despite their public shows of solidarity with him during his dispute with Irish horse racing magnates Magnier and McManus.

This experience helped to further loosen the emotional bonds between the protesting fans and 'the club', of which manager Ferguson was now in their eyes an influential actor, as opposed to the more warmly-regarded notion of him as part of 'the team' as the fans had seen him in the past. His subsequent criticism of protesting fans, and in particular FC United, has led to Ferguson suffering a real 'fall from grace' in the eyes of the club's most critical supporters.

Ferguson seems aware of the views of many fans within the Manchester United supporter community who used to see him as on their side, acknowledging that *"a lot has been said about the situation, with calls for me to resign in some quarters...I do have sympathy with the supporters. No-one has supported their cause more than me"*. Ferguson then justified his stance by pointing to the pragmatic realities of the situation by asserting *"when the club became a PLC, somebody was going to buy us...Let's stick together and be a truly united football club. That is the only way to achieve success"* (Manchester Evening News, 2005c).

From enjoying an image of a 'man of the people' emanating mainly from his background as a union 'shop steward' in his native Govan shipyards, as well as his previous support for fan democracy causes, Ferguson now relies on his record as a successful manager to avoid outright criticism from many fans. A perception of Ferguson as an influential backer of the hated Glazer regime, together with the about turn in his professed solidarity with supporter

concerns, and not to mention his recent public image as racehorse breeder, wine connoisseur and of course 'knight of the realm', has led to Ferguson being labelled a ‘champagne socialist’ by many disillusioned fans.

This was part of the process in which fans moved from almost deferential ‘hero-worship’ to disenchantment, and therefore played a key role in the development of a more philosophical view of what constitutes ‘the club’, building on a critically nurtured perspective characterised in part by the refrain ‘love the team, hate the club’. King (1998) referred to this ‘imaginary schism’ Manchester United fans made between the business side of their club and the playing side, in order to deal with on the one hand their awareness of the club’s excessive commercialisation, and on the other their desire to continue supporting the team as before. Crabbe and Brown (2004: 43) add that this position was *“both resistant and compliant at the same time”*.

“City 'til I Cry!”...“Hate Football, Love City”

The first exclamation above is the name of a popular Manchester City fanzine, and the second is its 'strap line', which is also followed by the legend *“Manc Attitude... Manc Pride... Manc Club”*. It is clear from this fanzine and others, that Manchester City fans have many of the same concerns as their United counterparts. Two of the most prominent individuals in presenting a more radical critique of the club, which has far from endeared them to many fans, are Phill Gatenby and Simon Cooper, whose views were gathered in personal interviews as well as from public statements in the fanzines and wider press.

Phill Gatenby was closely involved with City fanzines 'Blueprint' and 'This Charming Fan', and as well as being Secretary of the Manchester City Supporters' Association and a committee member of the national Football Supporters' Federation, has campaigned lengthily for the safe standing campaign 'Stand Up, Sit Down'. Gatenby's was one of the voices behind an idea to set up a City equivalent to FC United in the summer of 2005, that received a mostly very negative response from City fans as covered in Chapter 6.

“There is no single issue affecting City fans that will result in a good number divorcing themselves from the club with the determination to 'go it alone'” says Gatenby (interview with author, 03/11/05), who feels that they are concerned by the same broad problems as United fans, though with their anger directed much more at the top levels of the game in general than at their own club: *“I am totally disillusioned with football – it's not anything*

City have done in particular. I haven't decided whether I will be going to games this season yet, but I turned away in disgust when I went to pick up my membership card recently and they wanted £20 for it" (Manchester Evening News, 2005b).

Simon Cooper, leading campaigner for City fans' 'Atmosphere Action Group' (now renamed 'Bluewatch') and contributor to 'City 'till I Cry!' fanzine, similarly felt that while City must 'swim with the sharks' (other, more commercially aggressive clubs) to avoid going under, there isn't much left for the traditional football fan at City any more. Cooper was quick to question Manchester City fans who ridicule the prospect of 'switching allegiance' to a new club, by asking them to think about what 'their football club' actually consists of: *"What do you love about City? The history, the fans, the atmosphere, the badge, the tradition, the day with your mates. Over the last ten years what has the game lost? What has your club lost? Answer?...all of the above"* (interview with author, 10/11/05).

Pointing to a change in attitude by City officials towards fans in recent years, Gatenby explained *"when City were in the old Third Division in 1998/99, the club couldn't do enough for supporters …with players going to all the meetings and we were told and told and told how much the fans meant…and were the lifeblood of the club. Once back in the promised land, we became surplus to requirements as it was obvious we would simply turn up and be happy to be back at the party again. Only for some of us, four years on, the party has ended and others are now beginning to look at their watches too"* (interview with author, 03/11/05).

While both Cooper and Gatenby remained pessimistic about the immediate chances of their 'Fans Football Club City' idea coming to fruition, they strongly believed it would be the best way forward for City fans who share their concerns. Cooper claimed that *"the City fans we have approached are 75 per cent in favour. The club doesn't seem to be listening to fans...we will call ourselves FFC...We consider ourselves to be hard-core City fans – before I had my two kids I was home and away for 21 years...but it has got to the point where the spirit has died. You can't stand up and sing, and the passion and atmosphere has disappeared...We are all blues and will be City till we die, but football is pricing people like us out of the game"* (Manchester Evening News, 2005b).

Gatenby concurred as he cast his eye over goings on at United: *"when it comes down to it we all want the same things. When I saw that advert in the MEN for your first game at Leigh, it*

really brought home to me that this wasn't just a pipe dream. I saw it and thought 'they've actually done it, they've pulled it off', and I admit I was a little jealous as the things mentioned in the advert – standing up, singing, cheap pay on the gate entry – were all the things I wanted as a football fan" (interview with author, 03/11/05).

Despite his admiration for the ideas behind FC United, Gatenby acknowledged that City would need a club of their own if they were to go down the same route, stating *"although I agree with everything FC United is about, I can never be a supporter. The red shirt wouldn't bother me, but I couldn't stand in the midst of a football crowd all bellowing out 'UNITED, UNITED'. I did hope they'd vote for 'Manchester Central' as the club name, as to me it wouldn't have had quite the in-your-face connection with United, but I can understand why fans wanted to keep that historical link."* (interview with author, 03/11/05).

Cooper looked forward to a time when fan-owned clubs are established out of many leading clubs, and echoing much of the sentiment at many of United supporters' public meetings, claimed *"our game has been stolen from us, it's time to take it back...A republic with our own leagues. Impossible you say...nothing is impossible. You think you could never love another team? We take the ingredients we love and miss and rebuild our club, around our rules and laws...Can you taste it?...we the fans of Manchester City can break-away and form our own club. Viva la revolution!"*. These impassioned words were not well received by most even in City's independent fan network, summed up by the response of the fanzine editor who published Cooper's plea: *"I've said it before, but I'll say it again...CTIC, while supportive of the criticisms of the Premiership Ponces, cannot cheat on their one true love"* (City 'till I Cry!, 2005).

The responses of Manchester City supporters are then very similar to those of most Manchester United fans, in that traditional notions of devotion to the club, to be 'blindly' loyal, or at least with one eye firmly shut, 'through thick and thin' have prevented them from embracing a more radical defence of the supporter cultures they so cherish. The difference between the two clubs' supporter cultures in this regard however, is that the 'hate' in the long-standing 'love the team, hate the club' compromise at United is clearly aimed at 'the club'. For City fans, the focus of 'hate' is towards top-level football in general, with their club seen as a victim of other clubs' cynical enterprises.

So while City fans remain unable or unwilling to see their club as complicit in the changes

they resent, the United fans have had no qualms about recognising that a big part of the problems they were facing rested in 'their' club. Until 2005, most adopting this 'love the team, hate the club' position were still more heavily swayed by their desire to support their team to let their frustrations threaten that love.

For many Manchester United fans however, this critical stance had now developed to such an extent that this compromise became untenable (Brown, 2007). They realised that this position was merely helping to facilitate the developments they ideologically opposed, as well as exacerbating the lack of power held by them as supporters. Accordingly, the fans were now taking on a more pivotal role themselves in terms of how they defined the club, and this empowerment would be one of the key factors behind the formation of FC United.

As introduced earlier therefore, rather than continuing as passive, peripheral players in their relationship with the football club, these fans were now placing themselves at the centre, and effectively declaring that 'their' football club can not really be bought, because to them the fans are the football club. On the night of the Glazer family's first visit to Old Trafford for example, amongst the heated protests that resulted in the new owners being barricaded *inside* the ground, and later escorted away from the ground in the back of a police van (see Brown, 2007), one fan was heard to repeatedly shout *"You've only bought the bricks and mortar, you'll never buy the club"* (author's field notes, 29th June 2005).

This change in perspective is particularly significant, as it threatens to undermine many of the fundamental assumptions supporters make about their identities as football fans. Supporters in this case are therefore shedding the submissive skin through which they defined themselves traditionally, and importantly are not now allowing their football allegiances to suffocate their wider principles.

It was through the process of opposition and, ultimately, active resistance - which naturally involved a great deal of passionate debate and protest - that fans started to re-think their relationship with the club. Arguing over points of principle and tackling issues which go beyond the narrow confines of the football club necessitated a willingness to see a bigger picture. Understanding how the football industry works therefore became necessary in these campaigns and beyond that, recognising the influence of the media and government meant that these issues took on a wider resonance than just a dispute between a supporters' organisation and a football club.

This is the process by which previously bounded football issues are imbued with wider political principles, so that disputes over ticket prices become framed in debates over notions of the free market and regulation. Likewise, concerns over cultural ownership and supporter exclusion cannot be separated from political clashes over the importance of community, society and inclusion in the face of often competing economic interests. It is also clear that football fans will generally resist attempts to draw such links when they conceive their relationship with their football club along more traditional lines - that is, from a deferential standpoint of blind loyalty.

The following chapters bring FC United of Manchester into more focus, examining what this 'rebel' club represents for Manchester United fans concerned not just with issues of fan democracy, but also, as much as ever, with maintaining an authentic love for their club.

PART FOUR

FC UNITED OF MANCHESTER

This section contains two chapters which examine in detail the striking expression of some of the more emancipatory tendencies documented in the previous chapter, by addressing the phenomenon of FC United of Manchester, the fan-owned 'rebel' club set up by boycotting Manchester United supporters.

Chapter 8 introduces the core ideas and philosophy set out by those who instigated FC United of Manchester. Documented here are some of the problems which the club's new supporter-owners have had to deal with, which tend to have their origins in many of the unresolved cultural and political contestations and contradictions first encountered during the development of Manchester United's independent supporter movement.

Chapter 9 examines the supporters' understandings of their engagement with both FC United and Manchester United via autobiographical narratives of different kinds of 'journey'. Previously established criteria for categorising football spectators are then critiqued in light of research findings. Finally, the potential for wider political engagement is considered.

CHAPTER 8

"OUR CLUB, OUR RULES"

Football Club United of Manchester

"You can't be neutral on a moving train" (Howard Zinn, 1994)

Introduction

The seminal context to the formation of FC United of Manchester lies firmly in the development of the independent, critical and politicised supporter culture at Manchester United, as detailed in previous chapters. A theoretical thread has been applied within the analysis contained in the empirical chapters, in order to account for the relative position of various traditions, institutions and formations to the dominant cultural, social and political values of the time.

By utilising Raymond Williams' (1977) notion of the *dominant*, *residual* and *emergent* elements of culture therefore, an attempt has been made to document various key developments within Manchester's football supporter culture, and for methodological consistency in that of Manchester United's in particular, in order to assess the potential for politicised cultural resistance through engagement in football supporter culture. The potential therein for wider political engagement is also a key consideration, which must take into account the facilitating cultural factors as well as those aspects of culture that serve to limit attempts to create a counter hegemony.

This chapter therefore attempts to capture - borrowing terminology from the corporate employees of Manchester United and City - the 'essence' of FC United. This is not about a 'brand essence' however, but is concerned with the social, cultural and political significance of this *emergent* football club. First, the constitutional aims of the club are cited, along with a discussion of how FC United fans have in many cases 'shed the skin' of deferential 'blind' loyalty in favour of a more empowered perspective that places them, the fans, at the centre of their football club.

The conflicts inherent in this transformation are then considered, by looking at the existing notions of 'loyalty' among those Manchester United supporters who we might call 'United

loyalists', and the negative response they have displayed to the existence of this perceived 'threat' to their traditional cultural identifications. The chapter progresses by analysing the phenomenon of FC United via Social Movement theory, with key support from wider sociological and cultural studies theory that help to position the arguments within broader social and political debates.

Such debates are illustrated by some of the tensions observed within the FC United fan base, specifically surrounding questions of how overtly 'political' fans understand the club to be. In order to complement and perhaps challenge my own interpretations of the 'journey' to FC United, a number of autobiographical accounts are provided by FC United supporters of their own 'journey', highlighting the motivating factors from inside and outside of previous engagement in football culture, such as personal experiences or political outlooks, in convincing them to 'come on board' with FC United.

The challenging 'identity issues' of these fans, it is then argued, sheds new light on Richard Giulianotti's (2002) taxonomy of spectator identities, by suggesting that FC United supporters represent a break from traditional conceptions of authentic fandom, as understood in wider football culture as well as in academia. Finally, this chapter considers the extent to which the example of FC United can be seen to offer hope of genuine political engagement as a result of deep engagement in a popular cultural form that has traditionally, and still is, thought of as compliant and ultimately therefore, politically passive.

Rationale

FC United was formed principally to provide a credible, alternative match-going sanctuary for those Manchester United supporters who could or would no longer, for cultural, ethical, political or financial reasons, attend Manchester United matches. Despite major doubts many had with the justification, rationale, identity, potential and sustainability of FC United, the club has flourished and enjoys a steady match-going support as well as a healthy base of member-owners. It is a democratically run co-operative, with genuine community responsibility enshrined into its constitution (as well as legally, via an asset-lock), whose first team currently plays in the North West Counties Premier Division, three stages below the Football League.

Appendix 4 outlines FC United's club manifesto, as well as a report from the 'steering group' presented at its inaugural general meeting in July 2005, which reveals the

participatory, democratic principles the club attempted to establish from the outset.

As is emphasised in the previous chapter, the supporters who set up FC United primarily had a background in Manchester United's independent supporter culture. As such, their perception of their relationship to their club had undergone significant transformations throughout the 1990s and beyond, a period marked by fierce opposition amongst fans to the increasingly commercially-led changes taking place at Manchester United. This culminated in the 'Not For Sale' campaign that attempted to prevent Glazer from buying their club. With defeat in this campaign, the transformations in perspective among this now more independently-orientated group of fans led them to commit to a boycott, and ultimately, FC United.

> *"although the Glazer takeover was the catalyst, FC United is not just about him…it was about issues like the plc putting up ticket prices when we wanted them frozen, apart from corporate seats. Now, we want to build something positive, achieve something long term for the community. It's about legacy...We gained a lot of respect in the football community from our fight with Rupert Murdoch in 1999…it was then that IMUSA, together with Shareholders United and some fanzines, had the idea of forming a new club"*
>
> (Jules Spencer, FC United Board Member / former IMUSA Chair, cited in The Observer, 17/07/05)

Transformations within football supporter culture contain the potential therefore for fans to cast aside a traditional 'mainstay' of supporter authenticity - that of blind loyalty, or deference to 'the club'. United fans had in effect been (steadily or dramatically) placing fan democracy and their own positions of power as 'owners' or 'producers' of culture in the ascendancy, at the expense of being a 'loyal customer' of what some were increasingly seeing as merely a corporate 'shell'. So for these fans, the true spirit of the club rested in the supporters themselves, not the company that owned the trademarked brand. The lyrics of the FC United fans' song cited below reveal the importance placed by fans in seeing themselves as active agents in unfolding events rather than merely passive 'followers', a perspective that was emboldened for many fans accepted during the 'Not For Sale' campaign;

"Glazer, wherever you may be
you bought Old Trafford, but you can't buy me
I sang 'not for sale', and I meant just that
You can't buy me, you greedy twat"

(song regularly sung by FC United fans, to tune of 'Lord of the Dance')

This message is particularly important when considering those critics that point out that Manchester United were always for sale as a publicly limited company. The campaigning fans were well aware of this unfortunate fact, but for many – certainly not all – a realisation through the course of the campaign that it was the fans' loyalty that was being sold and bought, led them to resist having their relationship with their club turned into a trade-able commodity, hence the emphasis above on the fans' understanding that they themselves, as opposed to the football club, were 'not for sale'.

A feeling also existed that as well as removing their support from the 'shell' that Glazer bought, the boycotting fans could also 'salvage' valuable cultural elements of Manchester United that had been or were being discarded or sidelined as a result of its aggressive commercial direction. Manchester United's Director of Communications Phil Townsend explained in Chapter 6 that the club crest had been 'simplified' for commercial trademarking reasons. This had happened more than once in recent decades, so that the removal of the words 'Football Club' became very symbolic for 'traditional' United fans, which perhaps explains the prominence of those words in the name of this 'rebel' club.

The red devil that sits in the centre of the current Manchester United crest was itself introduced in a re-branding exercise during the early 1970s (United We Stand, 2004), replacing the 'three stripes' generic to the city of Manchester coat of arms, that represent the city's three rivers (the Irwell, the Medlock and the Irk). United did retain the 'ship and sails' from the original design, and Manchester City have also used these elements in different versions of their club crest over the years. It was perhaps no surprise then that this aspect of the club's 'discarded' history was included on the crest of FC United of Manchester, as voted for by the club's founder members. In celebration of this, and with more than a nod towards the political sentiments of the song from which the tune and the basis of the lyrics are borrowed, FC United fans regularly sing the following (to the tune of Woody Guthrie's 'This Land is Your Land';

"this badge is your badge, this badge is my badge,
three stripes and three sails, oh what a fine badge,
they tried to take it, but we've replaced it,
on the shirt of United FC"

To some extent then, FC United sought to reclaim elements of Manchester United's past, in

order to provide an important cultural link for its fans, who still regarded themselves as Manchester United supporters. Given the focus of much of the campaigning carried out by the independent supporter groups and fanzines over previous years, it was no surprise that match-day atmosphere was a central attraction for those seeking the kind of experience that had been largely missing for so long in the top flight of English football.

> *"FC United is football like when I first started at Old Trafford in 1967"*
>
> -Supporter at FC United's first match (cited in The Observer, 17/07/05)

An alternative and more negative view was provided in the same newspaper article, though presumably not from a supporter attending the same match;

> *"What I don't understand about FC United is that they were brought up to support Man United. FC has nothing to do with Man U. It seems they hate Glazer more than they love the club. The most logical way to ensure longevity of Man United is to work with them and not against them"*
>
> -Manchester United Supporter (cited in The Observer, 17/07/05)

Field Account: "Judas Scum"

Clearly, not all Manchester United fans welcomed this development within the club's fan culture. A number of United 'loyalists' were very outspoken in their resentment of FC United, including some who had been prominent within United's hooligan scene, and who still carried a fair amount of influence amongst certain constituents of United's support. A hotly anticipated away game at new local rivals Salford City would bring these conflicts into a more visible and visceral form than the debates that had raged on the pages of fanzines and on internet message boards. Some FC United fans had already reported isolated threats or verbal abuse from 'loyalist' reds, but this night was a significant one for many FC fans still embedded within established networks of Manchester United's independent supporter culture;

Salford City v FC United of Manchester

The Willows, Salford 03/10/06

The game was held at The Willows, home of Salford Reds' Rugby League team, rather than Salford City's smaller home ground at Moor Lane, due to the size of the crowd expected. The Willows is similar to many old-style English football grounds, with separately built stands

coming together in an ad-hoc 'design', and is surrounded by terraced housing and dimly-lit alleyways.

I felt a certain sense of excitement as I made my way to the ground, recalling the experiences of my teenage years watching United at grounds such as The Baseball Ground, Ayresome Park and Maine Road. These grounds, like The Willows, had a certain homely feel to them, but accompanying that could also be a sense of menace for visiting supporters, especially for a club like Manchester United whose fans have had a reputation for disorder over the years. That said, the over-riding feeling when making my may into the ground was one of nostalgia, as the sights, sounds and smell couldn't help but fill my senses with a reassuring feeling that this new club could after all provide some of what had been lost during the years of the Premiership.

Inside the ground the atmosphere was electric, with one large terrace behind the goal filled with FC United supporters, swirling red, white and black scarves in the air, waving flags, holding banners and sending stirring, piercing songs through the Salford night air. Other stands were also quite full, and it appeared to be the biggest crowd so far at an FC United match, with a lot wearing Salford City colours - a large home support had been quite unusual for most FC United away games.

Early in the second half, the most striking incident of the night occurred, when two fans invaded the pitch carrying a banner that read *"FC Utd. Judas Scum: we're loyal"*. The game was held up for just a few minutes, but it was clear that it was Manchester United 'loyalists' that were behind the banner, much to the dismay of FC United fans. Following the game, which Salford won thanks to two late goals, there was a lot of trouble outside the ground, with reports of former red 'comrades' exchanging punches.

An abiding memory is seeing the shell-shocked look on one prominent figure in the FC United cause, as he tried to come to terms with the reality of being cast as the enemy by fellow Manchester United fans. Indeed, many FC fans reported afterwards that the experience shook their confidence in their own attachments to FC United, as well as that of friends. In retrospect, it seems that this was an unusually low point in relations between FC United fans and those still attending at Old Trafford*, with the vitriol largely subsiding following that night .

*It was noted during subsequent discussions that a number of the Manchester United 'loyalists' most vociferously opposed to the existence of FC United no longer go to games at Old Trafford or elsewhere, whether through banning orders or due to cost.

This account highlights the fragility of the new attachments and identifications made by FC United supporters. While their wider principles may have led them to boycott Manchester United matches, their sense of identity as Manchester United supporters was still exerting conflicting pressures, in this case as a result of encountering particularly narrow, apolitical 'loyalist' interpretations of what it means to be an authentic Manchester United fan. This was very different to unknown individuals on message boards criticising their actions, because criticism, abuse and now violence was seen here as coming from individuals and groups that were firmly enmeshed within the wider independent Manchester United supporter culture from which they had come, and to which they still felt a sense of belonging.

The same United loyalists were also keen to defend Manchester United manager Alex Ferguson, following an incident in 2005 which a supporter, upon seeing Ferguson walking through Budapest airport before a Champions League qualifying game, exclaimed *"You've fucked us over...you could've spoken out about it"*. Ferguson, accompanied by his team as well as members of the press, responded by pointing to the loyalty he felt to the 'close friends' he works with, claiming *"they come first in all of this"*. When the supporter asked *"don't the fans come first?"*, Ferguson replied blithely *"well I suppose they do come somewhere"*, before meeting the fan's complaint about ticket prices with *"if you don't like it, go and watch Chelsea"*[14] (McDonnell, 2005).

IMUSA later released a statement criticising Ferguson for this and other comments he subsequently made about protesting fans[15], likening his sentiments to Marie Antoinette's famous 'let them eat cake' retort. At IMUSA's next AGM, the same United loyalists said to be behind the Salford City incidents showed up and aggressively defended Ferguson, saying it was 'out of order' for IMUSA to publicly criticise Ferguson, and that they should issue an apology (author's field notes, 14/09/06).

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[14] Since this incident, FC United fans have enjoyed singing at games, to the tune of Ewan MacColl's 'Dirty Old Town': *"And Fergie said, go and watch Chelsea, are you havin' a laugh, we'll be watching FC"*.

[15] Writing in 2006, Ferguson targeted FC United directly, stating: *"I'm sorry about that. It is a bit sad that part, but I wonder just how big a United supporter they are...They seem to me to be promoting or projecting themselves a wee bit rather than saying `at the end of the day the club have made a decision, we'll stick by them' ...It's more about them than us"* (Manchester Evening News, 2006b).

The significance of the actions of such 'United loyalists' however, need not be over-estimated in terms of any lasting resonance for FC United supporters. The vast majority of FC United fans were eventually able to brush off such isolated incidents, with the 'loyalists' not taken too seriously in light of the FC United fans' own collective sense of loyalty and identity. Such extreme 'loyalist' positions failed to demand the respect they may previously have done, due to the attendant notions of blind loyalty and submissive deference to 'the club' that most FC United supporters were now comfortable with having left behind. Shortly after the Salford City game at which they had been labelled 'Judas Scum' by Manchester United loyalists, a banner appeared at an FC United match bearing a slogan based on a famous riposte by Bob Dylan to a similar taunt received in Manchester's Free Trade Hall in 1966. The banner read *"Judas?...I don't believe you"*.

It should also be re-emphasised that opposition to FC United did not just come in the extreme form described above. Many who broadly sympathised with the protesting fans' cause viewed a boycott (and by extension FC United) as a step too far. In Pete Crowther's reflexive account of FC United's first season, he reports of a United-supporting work colleague that *"no conceivable set of circumstances could persuade (him) that walking away from United was the right thing to do"* (Crowther, 2006: 33). For most fans, their sense of, or understanding of, loyalty just wouldn't allow them to countenance such actions. While usually seen as a strength within football culture, it is perhaps also the biggest challenge for those seeking to persuade fellow supporters to use the potential power they collectively possess.

Still contemplating his colleague's devotion to Manchester United, Crowther (2006: 33-34) observes that *"(being) a United fan is such a big part of who he is that, if he walked away from United, he'd have very little personality left. And even less conversation"*. While not particularly flattering, such a prognosis might be apt for many football supporters who put their 'unswerving' devotion to their club at the centre of their lives. It also reflects Bauman's description of 'liquid' modern men and women living 'underpatterned' lifestyles of leisure and consumption, apparently shorn of the 'patterned' existences of those who lived through the conditions of 'modernity' (Blackshaw, 2005).

Within Manchester United's independent supporter culture, it was clear that the presence of FC United was the cause of increasing resentment for some. Initially, contributors to fanzines such as Red Issue and United We Stand were keen to stress the ongoing bonds

between boycotters and 'loyalists', but the different paths each chose soon became a source of barely concealed animosity: *"Go away from our club, and don't come back telling us what to do"* (United We Stand, 2005b). FC United then were becoming a source of discomfort, a constant reminder for many of the painful decision they took to continue their physical and financial support of Glazer's Manchester United.

Hostility towards FC United did not pass without challenge of course, but the editor of the United We Stand fanzine eventually bowed to the pressure of those who didn't wish to be confronted with what had become seen as an 'incendiary' issue. FC United then were erased from the pages of the fanzine, freeing the 'loyalists' from facing the uncomfortable realities of a Glazer-owned Manchester United. A similar process is portrayed in Alex Garland's novel *The Beach* - also depicted in the film - of an injured member of the community being moved 'out of sight and out of mind', in order to allow others to return to normality, putting more troubling thoughts behind them.

One regular fanzine columnist summed up the 'loyalist' positioning of FC United as outcasts, when writing of Manchester United's chances of becoming league champions: *"let me tell you, if we do, it will feel like the greatest achievement ever. One in the eye for all the doubters and deserters. Will they be allowed back in for the celebrations? I don't think they should be. The doors have shut and the trains left the station"* (United We Stand, 2006: 19). FC United then were certainly not a welcome part of Manchester United's fan culture for many, the boundaries of which some wished to reign in to reflect their understanding of authentic, loyal support for their club.

It is also interesting to note the changing views of many Manchester City supporters towards FC United. While many initially seemed to revel in what was seen as an embarrassing symbol of Manchester United's much derided image of commercial excess, FC United fans' professions of their ongoing, if somewhat altered, status as Manchester United fans, partly through the singing of traditional Manchester United songs – some of which made unfavourable reference to Manchester City – soon tempered the early mocking enthusiasm for the new club from City supporters. The co-existence of the *residual* and the *emergent* - often consciously maintained - within FC United's supporter culture, is emphatically demonstrated in the lyrics of this re-worked version of Norman Greenbaum's 'Spirit in the Sky';

"won't pay Glazer, work for Sky
still sing City's gonna die
two Uniteds, but the soul is one
as the Busby Babes carry on..."

Despite some rival fans enjoying the 'schadenfreude' of seeing what had been described as 'civil war' at Manchester United, others did express genuine good will towards FC United, as expressed in this Manchester City fan's sentiments: *"I thought I'd never have anything in common with a Red but (this) really struck a chord with me...I've been watching City for over 35 years and have never strayed from the cause...From now on I'm off to my local team Maine Road*[16]*...the atmosphere's better than at City, the players care more and it says more about Manchester than millionaires playing for fans they couldn't give two honks of their Ferrari's horn for. Bring on the fans' derby next year when we play FC United"* (Manchester Evening News, 2006a: 27).

FC United was, after all, even for many fans of other clubs, an example of supporters taking purposeful action against what were widely agreed to be 'dismaying' aspects of the contemporary game, but which others had so far not been able to meaningfully resist. It is also fair to say that for some of FC United's harshest critics among fans of other clubs, it must have been difficult to reconcile their caricatured image of the 'average' Manchester United fan with any genuine attempts to oppose the game's commodification[17].

Social Movements, Culture and Political Engagement

In order to better understand both the facilitating and the constraining factors of attempts to engage supporters in campaigns, protests and perhaps beyond, it is helpful to look at the experiences of, and lessons learned from, social movements of a more overtly political nature. There is a wealth of literature on environmental campaigns, women's empowerment, gay rights and other social movements, along with more explicitly left-leaning political causes such as trades unions and other workers' struggles. Each of these areas has a discourse concerned with issues of engagement, developing a wider consciousness and maintaining a culture of resistance, that bears relevance here.

[16] Maine Road FC was formed in 1955 by Manchester City fans wanting to play organised football, rather than any protest against Manchester City. Some fans have suggested that Maine Road would be an ideal focus for disillusioned and disenfranchised City fans, rather than having to set up a new club from scratch.

[17] As reported in Chapter 6, many rival fans could only judge the Manchester United supporters' protests from within their existing caricatured perception of United fans, such as this Manchester City fan's appraisal: *"FC United is a pretty laughable enterprise, dreamed up by some bitter reds who thought nothing of paying for 6 kits a season and having merchandise/TV channels rammed down their throats"* (source: Manchester Online, 27/07/2005).

Within this general context Colin Barker (2001) suggests an inherent potential amongst ordinary men and women for engagement with 'alternative' political discourse, seen as largely stemming from varying levels of disenchantment most are said to feel with life under capitalist conditions, although he is also very mindful of the barriers that can stand between deference and resistance;

> *"The very openness of working-class life to a whole variety of other influences means that all 'socialist' tendencies are counteracted and contradicted, not least by material and ideological pressures towards passivity and accommodation with the existing order, and towards division rather than unity in the working-class ranks"*
>
> (Barker 2001: 40)

Barker goes on to explain that a rich, complex tapestry of lifestyles, allegiances, concerns and identifications weave themselves together both broadly and deeply, making any simplistic or one dimensional accounts or views of working class or mass culture extremely problematic. This of course makes attempts to 'tap into' the people's consciousness with ideologies of resistance equally fraught with pitfalls and contradictions (Barker, 2001).

A chief imperative in such attempts must always be to energise people who otherwise may not get involved in social struggles or movements. The 'transformative' effects that have been so often observed amongst those newly engaged in such activities have consistently been heralded as a fundamentally critical element, and for some may ultimately be of greater consequence than the campaign itself;

> *"the political significance of the…campaign lies less in the immediate aims of…(whatever is the focus of the protest)…and more in the creation of a climate of autonomy, disobedience and resistance"*
>
> 'John' of political theory magazine Aufheben (cited in Yearley and Forrester, 2000: 145)

The development within protesters of such 'altered states' of mind has been regularly trumpeted in social movement theory. Barker (1995: 81) refers to a *"creative moment"* and astutely relates this to Marx and Engels' perception of the need for people to cast off certain culturally-imbued constraints, and therefore to cleanse themselves of what they call *"the muck of ages"*. Later, Barker (1996 & 2001) points to work by Fantasia (1988), Klandermans (1992) and Naples (1998), as well as providing examples of his own, to emphasise the liberating and creative transformations that participants in social struggle can

experience.

When Manchester United fans, still enraptured with campaigning zeal following the heartbreaking defeat that was their club's takeover, decided to form FC United, there was an outpouring of creative and participatory energy. The transformative effects that involvement in the campaign's protests had brought were aptly described as *"our shaping walk"* in long-standing fanzine writer Rob Brady's reflective tome 'An Undividable Glow' (Brady, 2006). Involvement in FC United appeared therefore to inspire among fans a remarkable flow of creative energy via avenues such poetry, music, photography, graphic design and writing[18]. Indeed, wide participation in all aspects involved in making the club a success has been a defining feature of FC United's early history.

Brady's 'shaping walk' refers to the whole process that fans had gone through, incorporating initially the years of silent disenchantment as they witnessed their cultural world being structurally transformed by forces outside of their control. It also, importantly, must take into consideration the self-organisation and ultimately empowerment that came from supporter-run fanzines (Haynes, 1995) and campaign organisations (Nash, 2000).

Perhaps most crucially though, new perspectives can be seen to have been moulded through participation in the turmoil of the takeover campaign, the protest marches, the flashmobs, the defeat, the debates and the soul-searching, the crying and the rebuilding. For some, the activities they had taken part in during the campaign had meant an increased risk of physical harm and criminal records, yet for them the principles had become more important. Geras (1994) referred to the self-directed process of 'interiority', in which struggle itself becomes instrumental in the *"breaking of the subordinate consciousness of the working class"* (cited in Johnson, 1996: 166).

This often gradual process of transformation, as described in a multitude of social movement literature and observed within the campaigning Manchester United supporters here, is notoriously difficult and perhaps impossible to break down into its constituent parts in order to fully understand how it came about. The same transformations can not be observed in

[18] Part of this included fans writing books on their experiences. As well as Rob Brady's 'An Undividable Glow' (2006) and Pete Crowther's 'Our Club Our Rules' (2006) already cited in this chapter, supporter and volunteer Steven Wood wrote 'Trips on Glue' (2008). The title makes cryptic reference to Northern Premier League sponsors Unibond. In keeping with the importance within Mancunian football culture of local popular cultural references, as described in Chapter 2, the book's title is also a song lyric by 'Madchester' band The Stone Roses.

everybody involved, suggesting the presence of influential factors that can't be isolated to the context of the immediate campaign.

It is clear though that being involved in such a campaign, especially when sufficiently engaged to be receptive to the euphoria of victory and the despair of defeat, and all those leaps forward and steps back in between, to the intense feelings described by protesters that present a break from 'ordinary, everyday life', those in-between, out of time 'liminal' moments (Turner, 1968) that produce such a thrill or 'buzz' for those involved, makes such permanent transformations in perspective all the more possible.

For many other Manchester United fans though, even some who had been actively involved in the takeover protests, forming a new football club was too much of a jolt from the reality they had known. A feeling that they "just could never support another club" and that "it just won't be United" was a commonly-expressed reason for refusal to 'get on board' with FC United. For these fans then, it was one thing to recognise the pivotal role that fans play in defining a football club, but another thing altogether to imagine that the rebel fans could take 'the essence' of Manchester United with them.

Such contestations bring to the fore once again, though in a novel way, much of the discourse that surrounded the issue of 'new fans' that were seen by the broader Manchester United fanbase, as well as by many others, as less authentic than perceived 'traditional' supporters. Crabbe and Brown (2004) identify the relevance in this context of Bourdieu's (1984) work on distinction, citing his claim that *"(what) is at stake in the struggles about the meaning of the social world is power over the classificatory schemes and systems which are the basis of the representations of the groups and therefore of their mobilization and demobilisation"* (cited in Crabbe and Brown, 2004: 45).

Instances of the supporter protests moving into territory felt to be too uncomfortable for the pre-existing sensibilities of some, together with a jarring recognition that the immediate campaign had ultimately failed to engage with the club's wider support, highlights how social movements must be able to accommodate a whole range of prior and existing identities if they wish to shape large-scale collective action. Zygmunt Bauman's insights into 'liquid' modernity's maelstrom of competing and contradictory meanings, from which increasingly isolated individuals must try to make sense of their world (see Blackshaw, 2005), offers us a great deal in our attempts as academics to do likewise.

While Marx and Engels warned of the debilitating influence of the 'muck of ages' ingrained in the existing affiliations and loyalties of ordinary men and women, Bauman points to the *"feebleness, weakness, brevity and frailty of bonds"* (Rojek, 2004: 301) experienced within 'liquid' modernity. We may speculate then that the problem, as far as political engagement is concerned, is that whereas most living under the conditions of modernity observed by Marx and Engels were marked by binding, disempowering identifications such as nationalism or religion, perhaps the *underpatterned* lives that Bauman describes are so averse to any mind of 'muck' that they feverishly wash away anything that threatens to leave any lasting marks.

When faced with a path on which it may prove difficult to keep their shoes clean, Bauman suggests that the first reaction of 'liquid' modern individuals would be to turn round and walk the other way. Much more clean and comfortable paths exist elsewhere of course, with no lasting commitments or responsibilities required via the fleeting exchanges of 'liquid modern' consumer culture. The symbolism of the bright, artificial environment of the shopping mall (Bowlby, 1997), as well as the safe, sanitised contemporary all-seat football stadium (Bale, 1993), perhaps therefore resonates palpably in the tone of those pleas to *'leave your politics at the door'* like a dirty pair of shoes.

This is a particularly acute issue for social movements precisely because they represent an attempt to challenge the superficially clean status quo, the safe, steady state to which so many existing identities are complexly linked. The challenges to be faced in facilitating the negotiation of what Ulrich Beck recognised would need to be *"a biographical solution to systemic contradictions"* (cited in Blackshaw 2005: 92), are therefore enormous.

In this context, perhaps capitalism's greatest strength - shown both in becoming the dominant ideology and remaining so - has been its ability to encompass a whole mass of competing and contradictory values, perspectives and allegiances within a framework that comes close to declaring that 'anything goes'. More community-sensitive ideologies on the other hand, by championing social equality and the curtailment or regulation of activities that it is feared may deepen inequalities, present more visible, albeit ethically-grounded, constraints and can therefore threaten those whose career, family or cultural interests may already lie in pursuing such 'exclusionary' activities.

So bearing in mind the difficulties involved in persuading people to take action against what

may appear to them as an immovable state of affairs, when the innumerable ways in which those people's interests are interwoven in with the structures, institutions and systems you want them to oppose are considered, the task seems all the more daunting. Rather than attempting to directly answer Lenin's pivotal question of 'what is to be done?', this research aims merely to shed some flickering light on the processes and implications involved in one particular instance of cultural resistance.

FC United and 'community'

The term 'community' is clearly important for FC United. Commitments to being 'accessible' and 'of benefit' to its local communities are written into its constitution, and via an 'asset lock' voted into the club's rules in 2010, FC United's assets (including any future stadium) must be able to demonstrate such community access and benefit. This assurance was formalised in order to raise funds for a new ground (at the time planned for Newton Heath) via an innovative 'Community Share' scheme, which allows people to invest money in the club without disrupting the one-member, one-vote democratic structure. The asset lock then ensures that the club's future stadium and other facilities can never be sold for financial gain, even if the club's future members were ever to vote for such a move.

FC United has also been pro-active in developing its community links with local residents around its current temporary home and also close to its planned future ground, first in Newton Heath and currently in Moston. As well as their 'neighbourhood' communities and the supporters, much of the 'community work' the club engages in is based around what Brown et al. (2006: 5) call *"communities of disadvantage"*. In recent years football clubs have increasingly come to be seen - particularly following the 'social inclusion' policies of the 'New Labour' government from 1997 - as ideally placed to deliver community benefits to such *"social problem communities"* (Blackshaw et al., 2003). The scope of football clubs' presumed influence under this 'cultural inclusion' approach is then seen to include *"health, education, community cohesion, regeneration and crime reduction"* (Mellor, 2008: 319).

It was arguably with such a view that the founders of FC United sought to build a football club that would 'genuinely' embrace its roles and responsibilities as a community-based football club. The democratic, co-operative structure of the club, in giving its members control over how the club is run and therefore making the club more accountable to stakeholders not motivated by financial profit, is seen as the best way to ensure that the club would live up to its promises. However, as football clubs clearly have a plurality of different

kinds of community stakeholders (Brown et al., 2006), it is important to emphasise that the supporters - who make up almost all of FC United's membership - will not necessarily hold the same interests as those of either local residents or of so-called 'communities of disadvantage'.

The ongoing efficacy of this 'community work' will therefore rest on the continuing vision of FC United's members (supporters, co-owners) that it is *"more than a football club"*, as described in club literature aiming to promote the planned 'Moston Community Stadium Facility' to local residents (FC United, 2011). While this chapter shows that the club's fan base can certainly not be considered homogeneous, it is fair to say that there is a wide consensus of support for the club to commit significant time and other resources to 'community work'. As discussed in Chapter 2, complex issues of diversity and inclusion must be negotiated for what is, after all, a football club that owes its existence and ongoing impetus to passionate calls for a return to 'traditional' supporter culture and match-day experience.

Traditionally, football culture has been characterised as exuding overtly masculine, white, working class values, and has been a domain from which groups such as women, homosexuals and ethnic minorities have tended to be excluded. This represents a significant challenge, even for a club whose supporter-owners have been observed as being broadly left-leaning with liberal outlooks when it comes to diversity and inclusion. The 'rooted cosmopolitan' outlook identified in Chapter 2**,** may be crucial here in maintaining a progressive discourse (Woodward, 2007) that avoids some of the 'regressive' tendencies that those resisting corporate encroachment are often accused (see Merrett, 2001, as well as the views of representatives of Manchester United and Manchester City in Chapter 6, and of Malcolm Glazer's spokesman cited in Chapter 7).

FC United and the 'Big Society'

Another potential challenge for FC United to negotiate, particularly considering the 'left-leaning' character of the club, is that setting itself up as a largely volunteer-run community organisation places it uncomfortably close to the current Conservative-led coalition government's concept of the 'Big Society'. There have been minor expressions of concern that through its community work, FC United may unwittingly help to validate this controversial ideology that many feel is merely a disingenuous cover for the cutting and ultimate privatisation of public services.

Indeed, this issue may face any voluntary organisation or individual with genuine aims to help their local community. It would require relatively complex awareness of the political implications of certain decisions and issues to maintain a position which might prevent their good intentions ultimately being used against the people and communities they seek to work with and for. The extent to which organisations are able to negotiate this potentially tricky terrain will perhaps rest on how overtly 'political' the organisation considers itself.

We can also contemplate whether FC United might be thought of as a community in itself. Its members seem happy to accept the closer bonds and associated responsibilities that come with most traditional conceptions of community, and through the regular interactions of fans, volunteers, players, management and board members, it is much more likely that - bearing in mind Anderson's 'imagined communities' critique - members would know a lot more other members than would be the case at most other football clubs of similar size or larger. Blackshaw (2008) addresses this point in urging that FC United - despite having *"its own consciousness"* contra an 'imagined community' - be regarded as a 'collectivity' rather than a community. Collectivities are thus defined as *"the kinds of institutions that are...constituted by like minded individuals, generous reciprocation and the necessary ups and downs that accompany them"* (Blackshaw, 2008: 337).

"Don't bring politics into this"

The principles on which FC United were formed, and the club constituted, were undoubtedly 'politicised'. A desire to resist corporate influence, to deliberately set low prices, making itself as accessible as possible, to be a 'not for profit', one-member-one-vote co-operative, to write community benefits into its constitution, and a refusal to have a shirt sponsor, all point clearly to a vision of a football club with left-leaning political principles.

Many of the fans' songs and banners make explicit reference to socialist folklore, to people's struggles against corporate and imperial power, to independence movements, anti-nationalist, anti-racist and anti-fascist sentiment and to artists and other icons linked to revolutionary movements. However, the club has been careful to avoid making explicit any categorical political identifications, recognising the inflammatory potential of overtly political moves.

Even amongst FC United's relatively politicised support, fans can still be deeply divided

over just how ‘political’ their club should be. For some there may be an obvious desire to intervene and take purposeful action for the social, cultural and economic good of Manchester United fans, but when this is bracketed in a way they see as conventionally ‘political’, away from football matters, the same goodwill is not so easily extended;

> *“I'm getting fucking bored being told that FC is political. If people want it to be political I'm sure there's a student on here who lives in a dorm, I wish you'd go and chat amongst yourselves before coming to games (or on here) to get if all off your chest. The fact remains that the steering committee was set up to provide a Saturday match experience for people who couldn't afford to go to Old Trafford or for boycotters and fuck all else.”*
>
> posted by ‘BB’ (fcumforum.org.uk 12/11/07)

In November 2007, two separate announcements appeared on the official FC United website which sparked these debates. First, it was revealed that the club had been invited to play in an end-of-season tournament in Hong Kong, with expenses to be covered by tournament sponsors Philips. The arguments for the trip largely centred on potential club exposure, player benefits and the lack of cost to the club. Those who argued against the trip cited China’s human rights record, and argued that it could sideline the local Manchester communities which are prioritised in the club’s constitution. The potential for positive publicity was questioned, with the possibility of negative press, linked to Manchester United’s ‘globalising’ commercial tendencies, also feared.

The debates, both in person and online, were fierce and highlighted a number of fissures within the club’s support that hadn’t been so visible previously. The main issue was to what extent, if at all, FC United should base its decisions and policies on political principles, as this would almost certainly come in to conflict with other measures of progress as a football club.

The second controversy was over an article on the club's website to suggest an inherent solidarity between the FC United’s founding principles and those of a current campaign against privatised education ‘academies’ by the National Union of Teachers (NUT). The statement publicised an upcoming march in Manchester city centre, and that NUT members would be attending that day’s match, with half of all NUT members’ entry fees going to support their campaign.

This caused uproar amongst many FC United fans, who felt that their club was being

'hijacked' by those with a 'political agenda';

> *"Sigh. Looks like the club leadership do intend it to be a (presumably left wing) political organisation then. I guess those of us who don't want political involvement, just a football club, have our answer."*
>
> posted by 'B' (fcumforum.org.uk 21/11/07)

Others however strongly supported the announcement, stating that the principles of FC United's existence can't be separated from wider struggles against the encroachment of the free market into what they feel should be regulated state or community institutions. The rather lengthy quote below highlights a fairly complex understanding of the links between 'culture', 'everyday life' and 'politics';

> *"The club has published a request from a trades union regarding an issue which affects us all. Despite strong feelings regarding the self-serving sell-outs that run the unions in this country I remain convinced of the need for democratically controlled unions. And I see a strong linkage between democratic control of social institutions such as unions, schools and local authorities, etc, and the need for democratically controlled sports facilities. Wherein lies the difference? Why draw a line of separation? Which bit is political and which is not?...I don't accept the circumscription of ideas and social actions implied by the establishment-defined separation of aspects of life into "political" and "non-political"... We're making a link. Spread your head... What is it about working people organising themselves against the forces of darkness that gets up certain noses? After all, we did it."*
>
> posted by 'a,c&c' (fcumforum.org.uk 21/11/07)

Similar arguments were reprised when a prominent and well respected figure at FC United spoke out 'in a personal capacity' against the English Defence League (see Appendix 7), who had organised a march in Manchester city centre. While some remained uncomfortable with the strident views expressed, again fearing that the club was being used as a platform for overtly political rhetoric, others sought to defend the comments by, ironically, doing just what the above 'poster' warned against, by drawing *"a line of separation"* between the political and non-political;

> *"I'm usually the first to argue that we shouldn't get involved in national political issues...But this sort of thing is outside Politics (with a capital P). Opposing these neo-dickbrained twats isn't about coming down on any side of a political debate. It's about basic principles of humanity. The club should always oppose bigotry not because it's the Leftie thing to do but because it's the human thing to do"*
>
> posted by 'FF' (fcumforum.org.uk 06/10/09)

Others however had serious reservations about FC United being linked to anything outside of football at all;

"i hope the name of fc united won't be used on banners/leaflets etc. as a member i've not agreed to the name to be used for a political protest/something that has nothing to do with a football team"

posted by 'Br_Br' (fcumforum.org.uk 06/10/09)

"I think this could damage Fc United by making the club a target for the far right. That is turn will put people off coming...The club should stick to what was agreed at the EGM. To me open to all means everyone. Just leave your baggage at the gate"

posted by 'AR' (fcumforum.org.uk 06/10/09)

The above post by 'Br_Br' reveals the inherent limits that come with membership of any organisation, in that some members' views of what 'they' represent is likely to differ from those of fellow members. It is often only when a particular issue arises that these different understandings come to light, often accompanied by frustration at the now noticeable absence of clear, all-encompassing rules or guidelines that may have explicitly set out the organisation's stance on such scenarios. An understanding that different political dispositions are carried by different members, can therefore lead to the commonly held view, as expressed above by 'AR', that in order to smoothly accommodate these divergent views, political 'baggage' should be left outside.

Gramsci's insights into the hegemonic manoeuvrings of dominant ideology highlight the disingenuous pretext of such pragmatic viewpoints, as they rely on a 'common-sense' assumption that only those views that differ from or oppose the currently dominant ideology are 'political', whereas those ideas that do not present a challenge, such as an insistence that these political views be left outside, are cast as politically neutral and therefore as without consequence (see Gramsci, 1971; also Forgacs and Nowell-Smith, 1985). That such politically-disengaging logic informs dominant discourses in the media, education and even politics, ensures that substantial challenges to powerful structures remain sidelined. Calls for purposeful action are therefore viewed with suspicion and cynicism, often alongside agreements 'in principle' to the ultimate aims of that action.

Similar debates continue to be reignited as certain unforeseen issues arise, with no clear consensus developing that might appease those who fear the explicitly political. On the day of FC United's biggest on-pitch triumph in November 2010 when they beat professional League One side Rochdale in the FA Cup, the club refused to speak to representatives from the BBC in support of the organisation's striking journalists. While some again expressed concern at 'being political' especially when the National Union of Journalist's magazine

reported that FC United *"says it was founded on socialist principles"* (NUJ, 2010: 6), and others worried that the club may be making enemies within the media hierarchy, most expressed pride at the club's stance, though not all in the provocative language expressed by this fan;

> *"the club's stance on the BBC strike was almost as heartwarming as the result at Spotland. Long may it continue...We all have a long fight ahead as the Tories attempt to break us all to set their horrendous, selfish and spiteful ideologies in stone. FC United, like all community-minded bodies, will play its part in the fight back. Be proud of that and stay solid comrades"*
>
> posted by 'm' (afinelung.com, 21/12/10)

Many FC United supporters then, as shown in some of the comments above and actions elsewhere, have shown that they are not afraid to engage in 'politics' that stretch beyond the narrower interests of their club and the game. The extent to which different kinds of 'politicised' perspective might have resulted from the protests discussed here, or from other influences in supporters' lives, has accordingly been a key consideration. To that end, supporters' own 'stories' of how they came to be involved with FC United are presented in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 9

"JOURNEY TO FC UNITED"

"The challenge of modernity is to live without illusions
and without becoming disillusioned"
Antonio Gramsci

Introduction: Journey Types

Despite the unique circumstances from which FC United were formed, it is important to emphasise that as with any other 'grouping' of football fans, there is no identifiably generic FC United supporter. There is also an attendant unease that such an exercise of putting people into categories carries the mark of modernity's obsession with applying structure and order to the world, and accordingly all the life within it. Such apprehension centres on a concern that in making human life more understandable to academics or others by applying the frameworks of modern science, all we present is a view of the world that has first been filtered through the dominant values and ideologies that perhaps our studied world is attempting to resist (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994; Blackshaw, 2005).

Such concerns however need not result in a debilitating relativist fear of descriptions and labels, as they can often help guide our understanding of what we observe, as long of course as a sufficiently critical perspective is maintained. With these reservations in mind, in order to complement my own auto-ethnographic and other data, individual supporters were invited to tell the story of their own 'journey' to FC United, and in each case an attempt is made to assess these autobiographical accounts in light of four identified journey types, informed via empirical observations.

I described in the methods section how the research took a 'political turn' following the events in the summer of 2005, in line with a similar change in my perspective as a football supporter. Not everybody involved in those events underwent the same cultural, social and political journey. For some the 'politics' of the issues were not consciously embraced, whereas for others the overtly political position from which they approached the situation was merely a continuation, or a reawakening, or even a realigning, of longer-standing critical engagements with politics.

Each different kind of ‘journey’ presents interesting implications not just in terms of political engagement, but also for the journey takers' status as ‘authentic’ football supporters. They are all interesting for different reasons, as each can shed some light on the role that popular culture, and football in particular, can potentially play in fostering a more critical and politicised perspective among participants.

Detailed below are four main types of ‘journey’ recognised via participant observation throughout the ‘Not For Sale’ campaign and through close engagement with the supporter culture of FC United of Manchester, which in part illustrate the heterogeneous nature of the protesting fans. As emphasised above, there is no intention to use such categories deterministically, though they do provide a useful way of providing a ‘quick recognition’ of some of the different perspectives of those involved, albeit developed within different time scales and at different rates, but all variously and incongruously overlapping in the time the research took place;

- **Journey A**: Those who had no significant prior political engagement or consciousness, and whose involvement in the campaign and subsequently FC United, has remained relatively narrow, focusing solely on the immediate cultural ‘football’ or ‘United’ issues. They may feel some discomfort with politically charged discourse, and would seek to resist the club being linked to explicitly political wider issues.

- **Journey B**: Those who, as above, didn’t have significant active engagement with a wider political consciousness before the takeover campaign, but whose initial relatively narrow cultural concerns as Manchester United fans have developed into a much more critical stance on wider political issues as a result of getting involved.

- **Journey C**: Those who were relatively ‘politically engaged’ before the campaign, but for whom the campaign has resulted in their cultural identity as Manchester United fans ‘falling into line’ with their previously detached political views. The ‘love the team, hate the club’ dichotomy may have held some resonance, though their involvement in independent supporter culture in the past may have been mainly for narrower cultural reasons, rather than anything consciously political in a wider sense.

- **Journey D**: Those who had an engaged political consciousness beforehand, and for whom the campaign represented a continuation of a ‘politically charged’ cultural

perspective. Such fans would likely have been engaged in ‘supporter politics’ before this campaign, and may have relied heavily on the ‘love the team, hate the club’ compromise in continuing their active support for Manchester United.

This exercise is only intended to account for the journeys undertaken by those supporters engaged in the campaign to oppose Glazer's takeover of Manchester United, and who have subsequently become involved with FC United of Manchester. It does not take into account those Manchester United fans not involved in the 'Not For Sale' campaign, as any attempt to categorise the whole Manchester United fan base in this context would represent a task akin to mapping the political engagement of football fans generally or even the wider population, such is the generic nature of the club's huge fan base. For one, as highlighted in the interview with Manchester United's Director of Communications Phil Townsend, agreeing on a definition of what constitutes a Manchester United fan would in itself prove extremely difficult.

Likewise, for the purposes of this specific exercise, it was decided not to seek the autobiographical accounts of those FC United supporters who did not have a prior engagement with the anti-takeover campaign or with Manchester United in general, and nor does it include campaigning Manchester United fans who didn't subsequently follow FC United, although all of these different journeys and destinations are acknowledged and accounted for elsewhere. A recognition of the potential added value of a wider ethnographic study encompassing a fuller range of supporter experiences has been present throughout, and remains a specific aspect of the research that has scope for further exploration in the immediate future.

As alluded to above, and as with all such attempts to categorise people, there are of course campaigners who would struggle to place themselves in just one or indeed any at all of the above categories. So even when the field of Manchester United fans has been narrowed down to include only those supporters who actively took part in the ‘Not For Sale’ campaign and went on to follow FC United, there are still limitations involved in applying such categories.

Of utmost importance in this particular data gathering exercise was a desire to offer a direct voice to individual actors within the research field. Ultimately, the goal was to provide a range of perspectives that previous observations had informed me would provide as full a

range of ‘journey types’ as possible. Within the constraints of this thesis however - such as the requirement that most of the thesis must be written by myself! - it was necessary for me to be more selective than would have been the case had the research been more quantitative in nature.

For example, I considered posting a public request on a prominent FC United supporters' internet forum asking for such stories, but having experience of the scepticism and suspicion that such academic requests tend to be viewed, particularly amongst FC United’s relatively critical and sceptical support, I decided against this option. I didn’t therefore wish to see my request become the focus for one of the contentious, usually degenerative debates that often occurs in such situations.

This concern was mostly predicated on what I saw as a necessary requirement for me to give ‘guidance notes’ on what kind of story I was looking for - namely one that refers to the teller’s previous and present level of engagement in United’s independent supporter culture, as well as in both football and wider ‘politics’. The contentious nature of debates over ‘politics’ amongst FC United fans, as made patently clear in the previous chapter, would mean that such a request would almost certainly prove a futile exercise.

There was also of course an attendant doubt whether such an approach would in any case provide the broad range of participants required, having observed that there does tend to be a handful of eager ‘posters’ who, at least in their engagement with this online message board, would not prove representative of the wider FC United fan base. This would have been further exacerbated in light of the above concerns with the sensitive subject of politics within that particular online community, leading perhaps to only those who considered themselves ‘political’ to take part.

There was also a possibility that I would be inundated with responses, thus providing a further methodological headache by necessitating a subjective selection process in which I would have to ‘cast aside’ stories which I might feel were less ‘suitable’ than others. This was of course all conjecture, though there were enough doubts over this option that I decided to take a different approach.

Having observed the many different motivations and perspectives of football fans in general, and these supporters in particular, over previous years - observations which allowed me to

define the four loose categories outlined above - I decided to approach particular individuals who I felt would provide a broad representative sample of FC United fans, according to the criteria I felt to be relevant in this context.

Such a subjective approach would perhaps fail to satisfy many scientific concerns over methodological validity that have been prominent within some more positivist approaches in traditional research environments, but having explicitly stated the immersed, engaged and 'value laden' perspective via which this research is conducted, I have confidence that this approach is ontologically and epistemologically consistent with the project's overall research paradigm.

The Journeys: Supporters' Autobiographical Accounts

To follow are three autobiographical accounts of FC United supporter journeys. They are labelled Journey A, Journey B and Journey D to account for which category set out above best describes their respective story. The accounts given of my own journey throughout this thesis are in keeping more with Journey C, as I did have some political engagement before the 'Not For Sale' campaign, although not in a significantly active sense. It was only when my (up until that point) relatively abstract political concerns manifestly appeared within my immediate cultural world that the two began to consciously co-exist for me.

I would add though that my identity as a Manchester United supporter had arguably been somewhat 'softened up' in order to accommodate its later political disposition, through previous engagement within the *residual* independent fan culture at the club. As discussed in more detail in Chapter 5, the fanzines in particular had a significant effect on my outlook in this regard. If the scope of the field research had also encompassed the previous decade or so, which I would characterise in this context as being the time during which more independent and critical sensibilities were developed among certain Manchester United supporters, it is likely that Journey B would prove more fitting.

Journey A

"I was a ST holder at Old Trafford and was staunchly anti-Glazer. During the 2004/5 season I aligned myself with the protests against the anticipated bid by Glazer to take over. I was a MUST member and a shareholder. I was very hopeful that we would repel the unwanted takeover attempt just as Murdoch

had been beaten nearly 10 years earlier. I attended several protests at Old Trafford and 'flash mob' events in Manchester. I also attended public meetings held in town.

Everything changed on May 12, 2005. I...made my way to south-east London in order to meet up with friends near to Charlton Athletic as we were all going to watch United's (reserves) take on Charlton reserves. I got a phone call from another friend dropping the bombshell that Glazer had just bought the Irish stake and were now effectively unstoppable.

The mood was sombre and we were all appalled by the prospect of such debt-laden new owners taking over. The discussion soon focused on what actions each individual would take as a result of the takeover. Sadly, I was in a minority of one in that I'd sung that I was 'not for sale' and I'd meant it with all of my heart. My affirmation that I absolutely would not renew was the only such declaration that afternoon. Subsequently several others from that group have also given up their season tickets and many are attendees at FC United but at that early stage I was the only one adamant that I would 'walk away.'

Anyway, my mood was very sombre indeed. After an hour or so in that pub I'd realised that the last thing I needed on that day was to be watching a Manchester United team. In retrospect I was probably already feeling some resentment against some of my friends who had also been sure that they would boycott any Glazer-owned United but who had offered a much softer stance to the new ownership regime in that pub that afternoon. I said my farewells and threw my ticket for that night's match onto the pub table and headed outside to trudge wearily to the car park before starting the long drive back to the north-west.

That reserve final would have been my 98th United match attended that season. I was 'ever present' at Old Trafford, also did a good few domestic aways as well as 3 or 4 Euro trips that season. In addition I followed United's reserves home and away and had seen several youth team matches. As May arrived I worked out that the trip to Charlton would be 98 with Southampton away in the league making 99 which just left the small matter of the Cup Final for me to complete my personal century.

(I advised) another friend that he should look to find a home for my Southampton and my Cup Final tickets as I would not be taking them up. He was shocked but understood my stand. Initially he tried to convince me to make the trip to Cardiff as a 'last hurrah' but I just could not bring myself to make that trip. I haven't watched them again (in the flesh) since. I attended at Old Trafford as part of the protests before the Champion's League qualifier and was expecting to feel a real urge to follow the crowds into the stadium but that desire to go inside never arrived. As 1945hrs ticked by and I stood on the forecourt I knew that it was all over for me here. The abuse hurled by some of those who were in attendance that night helped me to come to terms with the fact that there was little that I had in common with 'them.' It was now someone else's fight. Let them 'fight from within.'

At one of the public meetings at the Methodist Hall the idea of setting up a new club was mooted. At that stage I was pretty sure that any such 'Phoenix club' was not going to be for me. I was neither dismissive nor supportive, ambivalent would best describe my view at that stage. During that early-summer I watched developments with some interest as the new club was formed. I was away in Denmark with business when I received a series of text messages advising of the 'warm' reception received by the Glazers when they visited at Old Trafford. My heart was warmed by these actions.

As the FC United concept turned into a reality I decided that I'd 'give it a go' but was adamant that I would not get 'sucked in' by it as I had been by Manchester United. I'd go to a few matches, dip in and out as I wanted but would not become obsessed. Then I went to the first match at Leigh. It was a glorious day and the friend who'd been tasked with 'disposing' of my Southampton and Arsenal tickets had come up for the day. We met at my house and walked the 3 miles to Hilton Park. No-one knew what to expect. History will tell that there were more than 2,500 in attendance and the score was 0-0.

I'd enjoyed the experience but was still not 'captured.' A day or so after the match at Leigh I flew to the USA for a holiday. Prior to leaving I noted that I'd miss matches at Stalybridge and Wimbledon but with more interest I noted that there was another friendly scheduled at Flixton on the very day that I returned

from my holiday. I told my wife that if I didn't feel too jet-lagged I'd probably go. Slightly wearily I drove to Flixton and made my way into the 'bus-stop' stand and had an absolute blast. When Steve Torpey struck that shot and the net bulged for the very first time I was officially 'captured.' Subsequently I did not miss a match until the Curzon boycotted match[19] - InVision-gate - and even then I took in the alternative FC United reserves tussle at Abbey Hey.

I've probably missed fewer than 12 matches, home and away, since, almost exclusively because of work commitments. I think it's fair to say that my prediction that I would not get 'sucked in' this time has been well and truly proven false!

With regards to the political nature of our club.....this aspect sits somewhat uneasily with me. Personally I'm fairly apolitical but I am wholeheartedly behind what the club is doing and aspires to do in the future as far as promoting the fan ownership model as the 'right' way for football to go. I feel less comfortable when the club 'attaches' itself to other, non-football, issues. I understand the synergies between some of these other issues and the co-operative nature of our club but it still leaves me uncomfortable when the club is used as a vehicle for (non-football) political promotion."

Journey B

"I didn't take much of an interest in the ownership of United until Magnier and McManus fell out with Alex Ferguson in around 2004. Before this I was just interested in following the team and having a good day out. The BSkyB attempted takeover passed me by – in fact if anything I was...thinking that if more money was spent on the team this would be...good because the team would stay at the top.

Back in those days I was of the mindset that everything that comes out of Manchester United is good and the rest of the world is evil. I remember criticising Michael Crick for his book on Alex Ferguson, thinking that if he was a

[19] See Appendix 5.

true United fan he wouldn't write anything negative. I thought that Magnier and McManus were out of order for their 99 questions. It never crossed my mind that Ferguson himself might actually have something to answer for.

I still didn't do anything about what was going on 2004. I was proud that United fans had disrupted the horse racing at Hereford to send out a message to Coolmore but I didn't want to get my own hands dirty. Even when the Glazer threat was increasing and a protest was arranged outside the megastore for a game against Arsenal, I only turned up towards the end because I preferred to stay the pub.

I always thought that someone else would do the fighting for me. I was fully aware of the impact of a Glazer takeover but always thought there would be some nutter from Salford who would accept a few quid from some shady characters to take them out before anything happens. Even if it wasn't someone from Salford, United have over 70 million fans around the world if you believe what comes out of Old Trafford (and I used to), some bloke from Singapore would do it. It wouldn't be anything to do with me though.

I don't know what or who it was that made me realise that I had to stand up and be counted if I didn't want Glazer to take over United. I did the march from the cricket ground for the AC Milan game and joined Shareholders United. Things went a bit quiet on the takeover and I remember getting a phone call off a mate when I was at work a couple of days before the 2005 FA Cup Final telling me that Glazer had bought United.

I drove down to United straight after work and joined a few hundred others to protest. I'm not the type for causing civil unrest but this meant so much and if (that's what) was required to get the message across then that's what had to be done. I had never been involved in anything like it before and I remember having such an empty feeling at the end of it. I felt like United had been taken from me. I even said to a mate who was with me that I might as well jack my job in now. One of my biggest disappointments of that night was that I had text a number of friends to get down to Old Trafford and join the protest but none of them could be bothered. This disappointment escalated when a group of us went to the Cup Final, dressed in black expecting everyone else to do the same

in unity against the Glazer takeover. There can't have been more than a thousand who bothered.

I had already renewed my season ticket before the Glazer takeover. I decided I wasn't going to cancel it – I think the timing of the takeover was spot on from the Glazers point of view because it was too early for me personally to make such a big decision as stopping going. There was also talk of a "fight from within" and this was quite exciting.

During the close season, FC United was set up. I went to a meeting at the Apollo where it was discussed and my first reaction was that it wasn't United and this was the wrong route to take. We should all pull together to get the Glazers out and forming a new club would take the focus from this. Also, there wasn't the emotional attachment.

The more I heard about FC though, the more I took an interest and understood why people wanted to go down this route. I couldn't make up my mind whether I wanted to be part of it so I hedged my bets and made a donation to the club to become a founder member. I went to the Emergency General Meeting in June 2005 and this was the first time I started to think this might be the way forward. Andy Walsh spoke inspirationally about what the club represented and what we could achieve and how it would be the fans who were central to everything that happened. I still had some doubts about the club...but I left the Methodist Hall that night buzzing about FC United and what it stood for.

I went to the first game at Leigh and it was just like being at United. Most of my football mates were there and we got there in plenty of time for a few beers before. I had a great day and it felt special being part of it.

As the summer went on, I felt more and more betrayed by United, with Ferguson criticising FC United whenever it was mentioned and contradicting everything he had said previously about fans having a say in the running of the club.

It's difficult to explain to people what I went through that summer. People who also went through it understand but most will think that it's trivial because when

you look at coldly, all that happened was that a businessman bought a football club. But in a lot of ways it was like a bereavement. I had made some good mates and we had some great days out watching United but I knew that was going to end and I wouldn't be in touch with these lads anymore.

I wasn't at the first FC league game, instead I was at Goodison Park watching United play Everton. For the first time, being at United didn't feel right. United won comfortably but...I got an overwhelming sense that the vast majority of people in the away end that day just weren't arsed about the new owners. Worse was to come as I went to the first home game against Aston Villa...It was clear then that the fight from within wasn't going to happen.

I always intended to go to as many FC games as I could and enjoyed the craic but it took until new years day 2006 and a game against Winsford who were our nearest challengers for the title for me to feel a connection to the team. We won 2-1 after being 1-0 down and there were over 4000 people at the game. The atmosphere was the best I had experienced in a long time watching United.

I began to feel less part of Manchester United and more drawn to FC United of Manchester. I wasn't that bothered when United got beat as Ferguson kept coming out with ridiculous comments about how great the Glazers were. In around early 2006, I was asked by a bloke at work who I knew to be a City fan which team I supported and I told him FC United of Manchester. I suppose I was looking for a bit of a reaction but also I didn't want to call myself a Manchester United supporter because I was ashamed of what was happening at the club.

Despite all this, at the end of the season, I was still torn as to whether or not to give up my season ticket but was thrown a lifeline by someone offering to buy it off me. I finally gave it up the following year.

I think that FC has actually influenced me more than me being drawn to FC because it represented who I was. It made me realise that you don’t just have to put up with things you don’t like because that’s the way life is. I had been fortunate up to 2005 to have never been in a position were I felt that something I was extremely passionate about was being taken away from me or that wrong

was being done. I have had an interest in politics for most of my adult life but until FC came along it was very passive and I always expected others to do things that I believed in but couldn't be bothered to do. What I see the club to represent politically appeals to me although that was not my reason for going to FC. It was and still is a protest against Malcolm Glazer coming into my football club and destroying it for his own financial gain.

However, being part of FC has led me to educate myself about how big business has taken over a working class game that should be for the fans but is now for making money. One of the things I am most proud of about our club is a boycott made by FC fans of a top of the table match away at Curzon Ashton, when the league changed the kick off time to suit internet broadcasting[20]. We turned up at Abbey Hey instead to watch the reserves and there was a bigger crowd at that game.

It has also made me see that I can make a difference but I can't leave it for someone else to do it for me. It took me a while to get there but I did and it won't take as long if I'm in that situation in the future. I should do more for FC although I finally have a genuine excuse for not doing because I have a 7 month old daughter. When she is old enough I will encourage her to stand up for what she believes in and have the courage of her convictions to go through with it. I'll do this when she's stood next to me at FC United."

Journey D

"for me it was never about the Glazer takeover per se, the takeover resistance and its eventual failure was the kick up the arse I needed to actually do something that, if everybody else did, would force change. Defending one's decision to leave OT for FC, purely based on the fact that you don't like Glazer doesn't carry much weight. People are always saying to me –Edwards – Glazer – what's the difference? We never liked Edwards and now we don't like Glazer, so why throw your toys out of the pram and jump ship? Throughout the 90s I started to get increasingly pissed off with the way things were going. The battle

[20] See Appendix 5.

with Murdoch kicked my arse and made me show more interests in the politics and that fan power can make all the difference.

What we had enough of was the likes of Glazer who have no interest in Manchester United using our club for personal gain. The way he approached the takeover without any acknowledgement of the fans was typical of the way these people view those that are gonna be earning them the rewards they seek to reap. They don't give a fook. They laugh at the likes of us and they must be laughing louder now they're seeing OT full every week. No I didn't like Edwards, I didn't like the plc and I hate Glazer but where do you draw the line? Does the battered wife make any sense if she says well he beats me up but then again my 1st husband did so I can't see the difference? The pleasure I get from marriage outweighs the beatings.

I had often hoped that one day my kids could get a precious, much sought after, season ticket in J stand like me and we could all go to the match together but I started to question whether it was the right thing to get them into Manchester United. To bring them up and teach them the right things. Teach them how to behave. Help them with school work so they can achieve their best and get good exam results, maybe go to uni and ultimately get a decent job that they enjoy and gives them a decent living whilst keeping to a blueprint of basic socialist principles and when they get this decent job and it gives them that decent wage they're supposed to go to Old Trafford and hand it over to millionaires who don't give a shit about them. When they've handed over their wages they're supposed to idolise former shop-stewards that accept knighthoods from a parasite, they're supposed to shout the names of celebrities who blow that money on lots of cars, Rolexes, ridiculous clothing and ridiculous women.

I got to the stage where I started to plan to leave but I couldn't do it, I started to plan how I could reduce my outlay – season ticket sharing – picking the games etc. Maybe join the ever growing band of barstool Reds. I planned years ago to not pay over £30 a ticket so by that rule I would have jacked it in now anyway.

What the Glazer takeover did was show us United fans that we had a chance to

do something but only a few went for it and although I can't say this publicly the rest are scabs. More importantly Glazer has kicked my arse into doing something about businessmen like him (how many times do you hear fans moaning about chairmen yet doing fuckall) and while doing something about him we can also do something about the ridiculous celebrity footballer. The easy ways out are keep the status quo or to jack in altogether. Setting up a football club run by the fans? That could never be done

I'm proud that FC United was born in Manchester and prouder that it was United fans that gave birth to it – it's synonymous with Mancunian history. It's about people who have has the piss taken and are not prepared to have it taken anymore. Any boycotts that other fans are proclaiming now are, in my book, FC inspired.

Pulling in pissed off fans - I've not a problem anyone coming to watch FC provided that they can live with the songs that we've brought with us (we still sing city's gonna die) and that we are a club formed by Manchester United fans. – If they're young enough they can still become United.

Having said that I wouldn't want our support diluting to the point that our Unitedness is forgotten – I'd rather stay with the current numbers and in the Unibond than that happen. We've got to make sure our baby is breastfed with all the natural goodness of mothers' breastmilk and not bottle-fed with artificial milk which comes from farm cattle."

While each of these FC United supporters have undergone a quite different journey, both in terms of their cultural engagement with Manchester United and in the development of varying levels of politicised perspective, it is clear that certain traits are shared. Each underwent significant turmoil as they struggled to reconcile their loyalty and affection for Manchester United with their wider principles. A certain amount of doubt had to be overcome in order to first break the deferential or submissive sense of loyalty they felt to 'their club', and this also led to major doubts as to the cultural authenticity and efficacy of forming a new football club.

It is particularly interesting that this scepticism was relatively quickly overcome once FC

United became a reality. Imagining an alternative future, as social movement theorists such as Barker and Tyldesley (2002) recognise, often requires evidence that a different way of doing things can be a reality, in order for it to be seriously considered as a viable option. Perhaps here the role of Bourdieu's (1984) *cultural intermediaries* have an important role to play by both respecting existing cultural values and opening up the possibilities for authentic, meaningful alternative futures. Manchester United's long-established independent supporter movement is recognised here as the environment in which such nuanced cultural-political understandings were nurtured.

The 'steering committee' that did most to turn the idea of a breakaway football club into a reality had similar doubts and concerns as other fans who worried about the viability of such a venture (Brady, 2006). That they took a risk and, backed by the financial pledges of what would be its founder-members, laboured to make the club a reality, is a testament to the experience of organising and working with authorities gained throughout that independent supporter movement. Perhaps above all, through their collective long-standing engagement within the club's supporter culture they were able to maintain for a significant number of Manchester United fans an authentic voice which claimed that the 'essence' of their club is carried by the fans themselves.

Not a proper fan?

The difficulties of attempting to categorise people is further highlighted when the experiences of many of the supporters observed during this research are considered via previously established mapping structures of football supporters. Richard Giulianotti provided an insightful such structure in his 'Taxonomy of Spectator Identities in Football', which aimed to account for transformations under what he termed the *"hypercommodification"* of football (Giulianotti, 2002: 27).

His recognition of an acceleration of the market's influence on football in recent decades allowed Giulianotti to build upon similar critical appraisals of football spectator identities by Ian Taylor and Chas Critcher in the 1960s and 1970s respectively. In a similar vein to this research project, a central aim of Giulianotti's work was to provide a better understanding of the cultural implications for the fans of elite clubs in particular, as their game was seen to be ever more bound up within an increasingly unregulated global system of neoliberal ideologies and practices.

To this end, Giulianotti identified four main 'types' of spectator identity - the *"supporter"*, the *"follower"*, the *"fan"* and the *"flaneur"* (Giulianotti, 2002: 31). These different types of football 'spectator' were drawn up according to where they would best fit within the intersection of two axes of engagement – the 'hot-cool' axis and the 'traditional-consumer' axis. This allowed for quite a complex analysis of different football spectators' predispositions and outlooks, such as the relative 'thickness' of their 'solidarity', how they shaped their identity, the space they occupy, relations with others, and longevity (Giulianotti, 2002).

Due to the nature of his exercise, Giulianotti's careful use of the terms 'supporter', 'fan', 'follower' and 'flaneur' obviously carries more significance than when such terms are used interchangeably in this thesis. As explained in the introduction, my regular use of either 'supporter' or 'fan' carries no special significance other than when referring to Giulianotti's more value-laden labels, at which times I denote the fact by employing either single or double quotation marks.

The key issue found here is that although Giulianotti refers to notions of political awareness and cultural reflexivity, there appears to be no comfortable resting place within this taxonomy for those fans displaying a more overtly political disposition. Notably, many of the fans who decided to boycott Manchester United and set up a supporter-owned and run version of their club would struggle to fit into any of the four 'ideal types' of spectator identity without disrupting some of the pre-set conditional criteria.

The awkwardness that FC United supporters bring to the stage is perhaps not surprising, considering the difficulties the fans themselves have experienced in 'placing' themselves according to the established cultural values they hold dear. Any attempt to generically categorise the whole FC United fan base within Giulianotti's taxonomy would not be particularly helpful, as the model is clearly designed to account for individual fans, with no particular club or other demarcated group viewed homogenously within Giulianotti's discussions.

So as already examined in this chapter, FC United is made up of a perhaps surprisingly dynamic mix of different 'types' of supporter with different and often competing perspectives, aims and values. That said, there are some recognisable dominant traits that can without too much hand-wringing be used to 'test' Giulianotti's model against this 'emergent'

development in supporter culture.

Using Giulianotti's terminology to assess the nature of FC United fans' engagement with their club (still Manchester United*), the vast majority would be seen as a great deal more 'traditional' than 'consumer' orientated, primarily by virtue of both their *"grounded"* identities and their cultural and ideological opposition to the excessive influence of the market and the resulting commodification of football.

*This may raise a few eyebrows due to a commonly-held misapprehension that by forming 'another football club' these fans have given up their right to call themselves supporters of the club whose matches they are boycotting. To refute such claims, some fans have cast FC United as an extension of the independent supporter movement, following on from the production of fanzines to give themselves a voice, and independent campaign organisations to add action to that voice. For these fans then, their engagement with a club set up and run by Manchester United supporters is merely their (admittedly novel) way of manifesting their support given circumstances for which they didn't ask.

In terms of the intensity of their relationship with Manchester United, a large number of FC United members would still have to be described as 'hot' rather than 'cool' spectators due to the deep commitment they have shown, and continue to show, to their club's cause, both in organising themselves independently and attending matches regularly, only breaking the latter as a result of an intense level of commitment to the long term health of the club as shown in the biographical accounts in this chapter.

The problem, as far as these new 'politicised' or 'emancipated' supporters are concerned, is that they do not now seem to fit into Giulianotti's traditional-hot 'supporter' category, which after all is based upon those characteristics most valued within traditional supporter discourse. They have not stopped being 'hot' or 'traditional' supporters, at least from their understandings, as they still meet Giulianotti's qualifying criteria of having 'subcultural relations', a 'grounded identity', 'thick solidarity' and a 'topophilic' relationship with the same places as before, it is just that they feel the only way to retain all of that in any meaningful way is to try to stop those in power from taking away the means to express all of this.

As Giulianotti elucidates well, it is clear that this hot, traditional 'supporter' is disappearing

from at least the top levels of English football. Many 'supporters' now find that, because of circumstances seemingly beyond their control - namely the commodification and corporatisation of English football under the free market conditions of global capital - they are unable, physically, to continue in that active role anymore.

Their cherished ground, in which they placed such topophilic importance, might have been taken away from them[21]. Their 'subcultural relations' may have lessened or disappeared as friends and family were gradually 'priced out' of taking part. The 'thick solidarity' displayed through singing, chanting and other creative rituals of symbolic identity is largely a thing of the past, at least at home games and increasingly at away games too, due to the increasingly restrictive and policed ground regulations discussed earlier.

The reduction in status of their beloved local institution from an 'end' in itself to being a mere 'means' to someone else's 'financial ends' may well have been chipping away for some time at the deep, focal space occupied by the club in the mind of the traditional 'supporter'. Whether they have experienced all of the above or just a few, it can't be doubted that - as lamented by Manchester City supporter Simon Cooper in the previous chapter - the environment which supported all those factors used by Giulianotti to describe the pre-requisites for a hot, traditional 'supporter' is now under serious threat at the top level of English football, and may even be gone altogether.

As a result, those fans who in the past could unproblematically be described as a traditional 'supporter' have either stopped attending the match, or if they had been able to continue, will have faced increasing obstacles to actually being that 'supporter' they had been in the past. In order to keep their cherished place watching their team they therefore have no choice but to accept the role forcibly prescribed by the club owners and the game's rulers, a role that has much more in common with other categories in Giulianotti's taxonomy.

Many fans observed throughout the course of this research however, particularly those who have become 'emancipated' from the more submissive or deferential elements of Giulianotti's 'supporter' profile, have taken drastic action to preserve an environment in which their 'hot, traditional' forms of supporter culture could still be enacted, and not just

[21] Clubs that have moved away from their traditional homes include Derby County, Arsenal, Middlesbrough, Manchester City, Sunderland, Southampton, Leicester City, Bolton Wanderers, Swansea City, Wigan Athletic and many other league clubs. Major clubs that have announced plans to leave their grounds in the near future include Liverpool, West Ham United, Everton, Tottenham Hotspur and Nottingham Forest.

consigned to nostalgic reminiscences. The member-owners of FC United of Manchester for instance, have foregone their much-valued places in the stands at Old Trafford in part so they can keep their traditional match-going culture alive, and in some instances to revive some long-suppressed traditions.

A refusal to attend your club's matches is definitely not a traditionally-defined characteristic of the loyal football supporter, and the same can certainly be said for the setting up of your own club as an alternative. Such characteristics are therefore not accounted for in Giulianotti's descriptions of the *traditional*, *hot* 'supporter' or even the *cooler* 'follower', let alone the more market-centred 'fans' and 'flaneurs'. So where does this leave these 'protesting' fans? Can it be concluded that by giving up on blind loyalty they have also given up on being traditional football supporters?

It would appear that according to Giulianotti's taxonomy they have indeed stopped 'being' traditional football supporters. The problem is that because they have retained the majority of the traditional supporter's profile they do not fit anywhere else. I would in any case suggest that only the profile outlined in the 'supporter' category could come close to doing the protesting fans justice, as measured according to their own strongly-held cultural values, as well as the criteria used by Giulianotti - which tellingly only differs in terms of political empowerment.

Giulianotti readily acknowledges that he made a conscious decision to strip his 'supporters' of the political empowerment previously ascribed to them by Taylor and Critcher. This was justified elsewhere in his paper by rightly questioning both Taylor and Critcher's insistence that traditional supporters of the 1930s enjoyed a more active 'membership' style relationship with their clubs, when in fact clubs were far from democratically constituted. Giulianotti goes on to explain that the claims had been qualified somewhat by the authors' suggestions that fans' desire for a more equitable status and active role may have led to such a *"participatory democracy"* being *"wrongly or illusorily inferred"* (Giulianotti, 2002: 28).

An altogether different kind of 'political empowerment' has however been observed within the supporter culture of the boycotting Manchester United supporters. The only justification offered by Giulianotti for not accounting for political empowerment in his taxonomy is the actual lack of reciprocal engagement between Taylor and Critcher's 'modern' traditional supporters and their clubs. Subsequently, Giulianotti's 'postmodern' traditional supporters,

experiencing football's 'hypercommodification' (Giulianotti, 1999) under late 20th / early 21st Century global capitalism, are bereft not only of political empowerment like their grandparents were, but are seemingly also without political, participatory objectives or desires of any kind.

This position would actually tally with my own observations had a broader brush stroke been used to account for dominant or mainstream fan culture, as the fans of prime focus in my research are a numerically small, yet I would argue culturally significant, minority of one club's support. At this time, they are an anomaly in terms of their extreme actions and political engagement, so it can't be confidently claimed that these fans represent a kind of newly emergent 'ideal type' which might render Giulianotti's taxonomy redundant. Instead, I recognise that this taxonomy provides an evocative and still broadly encompassing framework from which to study the state of football culture at this time.

The only criticism I must express of this taxonomy therefore is that by not accounting for the potential of football supporters to actively resist the structural transformations that so threaten the environment in which they had previously flourished, the model excludes such fans from what might be constituted to be a genuine or authentic supporter. That said, as well as showing shrewd insight into the complexities of contemporary football supporter culture, Giulianotti does appear to empathise with these fans' concerns over the political-economic attack on their cultural domain that he discusses in detail throughout his work.

My concern then is that Giulianotti's taxonomy presents an unwittingly depressing picture of a submissive, disempowered supporter culture, that even when displaying great cultural creativity and vitality still remains politically impotent. It seems within this schema that the only contribution the traditional, hot 'supporter' can make to resisting the neoliberal, free market encroachment into football is to disappear from the scene, thus devaluing the game as a grounded, authentic spectacle, and presumably rendering it of little interest to the *"parasitic"* gaze of the cosmopolitan 'flaneur' and consumer fans, whose custom the market ultimately seeks (Giulianotti, 2002: 142).

While I wouldn't disagree with the latter sentiment, which after all echoes the warnings provided numerous times by independent supporter organisations and other fan discourse of 'killing the goose that laid the golden egg', it contains the fatalistic suggestion that only through the ultimately exhaustive efforts of the market forces themselves might their

progress be halted. Indeed, Giulianotti asserts that such an outcome would merely represent a *"Pyrrhic victory for the neoliberal agenda"* (2002: 42). What though of the *cultural* agenda of those defeated and tossed aside? It would surely be of no comfort to them that the capitalists now have to seek pastures new that are ripe for exploitation.

Surely therefore, there must be room made within what we conceive as 'authentic' football fandom for those who take a look around and don't like what's happening, and then rather than muttering "that's the way of the world" with shrugged shoulders, instead manage to foster sufficient strength and solidarity to stand up and shout that they are "Not For Sale". And mean it.

This difficulty was highlighted by the 'Green and Gold' campaign of opposition to the Glazers which was strongly encouraged and supported by the Manchester United Supporters Trust (MUST – formerly SU) during the 2009-10 and beyond. The rationale behind this campaign was that supporters would wear green and gold (yellow) colours to express their opposition while still actively supporting the Manchester United team in the stadium. Because many fans did not feel able to boycott matches, this provided them with the opportunity to make their opposition visible, while not threatening their status as loyal fans. Green and yellow were, importantly, the colours worn by the team from Newton Heath that would later change their name to Manchester United.

This reveals quite a lot about supporters' sensibilities around notions of loyalty, in that beyond not being able to withdraw their physical and financial support via a boycott, many fans are also unwilling to even symbolically protest without it carrying an ambiguous polysemy so as to provide a ready rebuttal to any accusations of disloyalty, because after all, how can wearing colours which are associated with a significant period in the club's history be disloyal? Even former player David Beckham realised this after playing against Manchester United for new club AC Milan. When asked why he had a green and yellow scarf that was thrown on to the Old Trafford pitch, he was quick to distance himself from the protests: *"It's the old colours of United...to be honest, it's not my business...I just support the team"* (Taylor, 2010).

For many critics, among which could be counted most, yet not all, FC United fans, any initial optimism over the new life this campaign may breathe into fans' opposition to the Glazers' ownership would deteriorate once the momentum gained throughout the 2009-10

season failed to materialise, again, into a call for a mass boycott by MUST. It was clear that many of the fans involved desperately wished to mount a meaningful campaign to protect the club they love, but by strictly adhering to relatively narrow conceptions of authentic football fandom, the fans were unable to move beyond *"passive dissent"*, thus ultimately rendering the protest *"an inert force"* (Clarke, 1990: 42).

The importance of symbolism, ambiguous or otherwise, in maintaining visible displays of loyalty to Manchester United while protesting against what is happening to the club, is of course also apparent at FC United, through the club's colours, badge, name, songs and on flags displayed in the ground, some of which contain the acronym 'MUFCUM'. Indeed, during FC United's first season one of the fixtures was designated as 'United United Day', with supporters urged to encourage friends to come along to assuage any doubts as to FC United fans' continued status as Manchester United fans (see Appendix 6).

A campaign, or indeed a categorising framework, that excludes or invalidates dissenting voices from conceptions of authenticity, no matter how critical of the dominant structures the creative rationale may be, ultimately risks reinforcing the values that maintain those unequal power relationships. How can protesting supporters meaningfully resist the offending power structures if to do so is seen to be culturally inauthentic?

Of course, Giulianotti's taxonomy was published three years before the Glazer takeover and the subsequent formation of FC United, so as a reflexive examination of football culture at that time it remains extremely informative. I do though think that the self-organisation of fans around independent campaign organisations and fanzines seen over the previous decade and more could have featured more prominently within the 'supporter' category, with due recognition of the critical cultural-political perspectives such developments had fostered.

I recognise that it is a thankless task to attempt such a mapping exercise, and in no way do I wish to offer anything but what is - with the crucial benefit of hindsight - a constructive critique of Giulianotti's taxonomy, which has proved of utmost value in developing my work. I would like to think that if Giulianotti were to update his taxonomy in light of attempts by some fans of elite clubs to 'emancipate' themselves while not wishing to cast away their traditional values and activities, the accepted descriptions of the authentic 'supporter' might at least contain some reference to the challenges those values are now facing, not just structurally from above but also culturally from below.

Football as a conduit for political engagement

In assessing the politicisation of football supporters, it would be remiss not to also consider the possibility that football, and other cultural arenas, may be able to provide a 'hook' to deeper engagement where more direct 'politics' perhaps often fails. This possibility is suggested in Philip Evanson's 1982 study of Brazilian culture in which he states that *"(football is) at once popular and liberating, and more immediately potent than polemical campaigns of the Left"* (cited in Giulianotti 1999: 16)

Football fans then, as in other walks of life, start to grapple with ideas of resistance when they see that 'things just aren't right the way they're going'. In the case many of the Manchester United fans described in this chapter who appear to have been able to cast aside some of the more submissive elements of their cultural values, their relatively lengthy engagement in 'football politics' via 'independent' self-organisation has been recognised as a crucial element.

However, even amongst many fans that have anxieties about the structure and direction of their football club, there is a deeply defended conservatism in not wishing to try to force change. They will of course accept change, even negative transformations, but are highly suspicious of any change proposed by fellow fans. Even an understanding that it is the fans who ultimately provide the income which funds the further exploitation of their club, and by extension themselves, fails to arouse much of a desire to 'rock the boat'.

The reactions of many Manchester United fans to the events and transformations that have impacted upon their cultural world, can be summed up quite well by Kincheloe and McLaren's (1994: 140) use of the term *"political unconscious"* to describe underlying, unarticulated tensions that are created by systemic imbalances in power. In line with Ulrich Beck's assertion regarding individual responses to structurally-created situations, these fans were very much on the receiving end of a globally-constituted process that only explicitly revealed itself in the most locally, culturally-specific ways.

Without a collective 'politicised' perspective from which to see the bigger picture in which they unwittingly appear, supporter reactions to unwelcome transformations in their cultural spaces can understandably be limited, consciously at least, to tackling only those immediate parts of the picture visible to them. As we have seen with the anti-politics rhetoric of some

fans, even amongst the relatively critical fans of FC United that given the background to their club's formation might be expected to share a broader politicised disposition, there remain deeply ingrained barriers to widening the scope of critique beyond the narrow world of football.

CHAPTER 10

CONCLUSION

> *"When people are by and large accepting of the world and their place in it, what they need are stories that justify this and tools that enable them to survive without making concerted challenges to the world and their previous ideas. When people find themselves confronted with structures and institutions that they see as immediately and actively hostile to them, these stories and tools become less than useful. This is a well-known aspect of movement experience, worth exploring in slightly more depth."*
>
> (Barker and Cox, 2002: 13)

This concluding chapter summarises the core context and themes of the thesis, including that of the culture of football fandom in England, with a specific focus on the local Mancunian context. The transformations that have seen fans start to create formations of resistance to recent transformations are of prime concern, and are therefore pivotal to the events and actions at the heart of the research.

Crucially, this chapter outlines the key empirical findings and analytical outcomes, firstly in terms of implications for the research field in particular, and then with a wider sociological lens, an assessment is made of the extent to which this thesis contributes to academic debate on a number of key issues.

Summary

Historically, English football culture has not tended to encourage any sense of political engagement among its adherents, other than perhaps as a platform for what Michael Billig (1995) described as *'banal'* expressions of national and local identity. There is a very strong argument that football in England has in fact been *avowedly* apolitical, seen to provide a usually welcome distraction, if not from consciously recognised forms of wider exploitation as such, then certainly for many from what might be seen as the relatively uninspiring confines of everyday work and domestic life.

Of course, political realities that exist in wider society, such as exclusion or marginalisation along race, gender, age, disability and class lines also permeate football culture. In some respects, football provides a more fertile breeding ground than many others for such exclusions. The hegemony of masculine values for instance is deeply ingrained in the structures and cultural traditions of football. Despite the fact that peoples' experience of

football fandom is therefore inescapably 'political', overtly political affiliation or rhetoric is not regarded as a traditional feature of English football culture. Indeed, where and when politics does make itself known within football culture, it tends to be treated as an unwelcome intruder.

In the context of this thesis therefore, politics has provided an interesting yet elusive conceptual focus. In a similar way to debates on the ongoing cogency of 'social class' as a concept with which to understand contemporary issues of inequality and exclusion (Giddens, 1991; Rowbotham and Beynon, 2001; Skeggs, 2004), 'politics' is understood within this context as a very real and defining aspect of the supporters' experiences, even if, as with class consciousness, those most affected by the political realities under scrutiny may not readily grasp its utility or relevance to their everyday experience and understandings.

Within this environment, English football has nevertheless witnessed the development of rich cultures of football fandom whereby supporters have been able to express their creativity and develop unique group identifications. These identities however have tended to be characterised and positioned largely in relation to local, regional and national rivalries with other football clubs and their fans, rather than through – as touched upon above – a meaningful sense of class consciousness. That said, the creative freedom afforded to football fans had allowed those with a deep engagement in fan culture to develop feelings of camaraderie and community, albeit increasingly more akin to the *'peg'* or *'ad hoc'* communities identified by Zygmunt Bauman (Blackshaw 2005: 104).

This environment therefore meant that English football supporters would define their identities based more upon culture- and class- based *tastes* and *distinctions* (Bourdieu, 1984), with and between other groups of fans, rather than through any wider social or political markers. This bounded, and in many ways culturally nurturing *habitus*, has allowed football supporter culture in England to develop layers of deep engagement while remaining, the above qualifications aside, politically 'value-free'.

Recent transformations in English football have seemed to diminish or remove that same possibility for alternative, meaningful engagement, and with it supporters have consistently lamented the loss of cultural creativity, atmosphere, camaraderie and distinction, all elements that were central to the lifelong deep engagement that – perhaps somewhat nostalgically – are seen as defining the 'traditional' football supporter.

New, more empowering perspectives on football fandom had been encouraged and nurtured within the independent fanzines and supporter association movement that emerged in English football culture around the late 1980s (Redhead, 1991; Haynes, 1995). At Manchester United, the 1990s brought the 'independent' supporter movement into regular conflict with those in charge of their club and the football industry. Crucially then, new critical perspectives were being articulated alongside a continuing devotion to their team.

That their club was at the forefront of the 'hypercommodification' of 'the global game' (Giulianotti, 1999) was significant. Cultural pressure from rival fans and the increasingly mainstream media presence of 'new' football fandom, positioned Manchester United fans in the popular football consciousness as 'inauthentic' due to their perceived position at the wrong end of both the traditionally prominent scale of loyalty (they were seen to be fickle) and also a newly emerging local-global scale of authentic fandom (they were thought not to come 'from Manchester').

The resultant reinvigoration amongst Manchester United fans of Mancunian sensibilities described by King (1998) and Brown (2004) amongst others, was occurring amidst a bountiful period of on-field success for their club. Not only did this success underpin the commercial development of Manchester United and feed the popular positioning of its fans as inauthentic, it also, I would argue, to *some* extent satiated some of the longing fans generally have to see their team achieve great heights. The hunger for on-pitch success has certainly been a key factor in Manchester City fans' embracing of commercially-underscored transformations in recent years, and had also been evident within United's support prior to, during and beyond its huge success in the 1990s.

So while the rhetoric of authentic fandom was certainly louder in popular (and self) conceptions of Manchester City, notions of tradition and authenticity were, often defensively, taken more to heart within a United fan culture that did not have to concern itself too much with the now regularly-delivered on-pitch success, so that many United fans put much more emphasis on their experience as supporters. This led to a deep engagement in the independent supporter culture of the club, including the fanzines and campaign organisations, as they sought to oppose encroaching commercial influences within their fan culture.

The match-going football fan of the late 20th and early 21st Centuries then, particularly at the top levels of English football, finds him or herself having little choice but to 'buy into' the commodified world of football fandom as a relatively 'passive' consumer, as opposed to what are seen as the more active and creative forms of fandom of previous years.

Many who would position themselves as traditional fans therefore see contemporary fandom as largely lacking in authenticity and cultural value. They point to exponential rises in ticket prices and the increasingly mediated and mass-marketed appeal of the football 'product' as reasons for this. It is widely believed that this has led to a 'new' audience replacing many 'traditional' fans, who had either been 'priced out' or who lost interest once new controls and restrictions were introduced to football grounds.

A desire to hang on to, or recreate, traditional fandom among those fans that have, up until now at least, been able and willing to maintain their engagement as match-going football supporters, has led many independent supporter groups to challenge the new structures in English football.

A sustained period of opposition to various club policies allowed many Manchester United fans to develop a more complex, critically-grounded relationship with their club than had been the case previously. The *'love the team, hate the club'* dichotomy allowed fans to existentially separate the business side of the club from the football side, and in effect to continue their support for *'the shirts'* while maintaining an ideological opposition to *'the suits'*.

As structural transformations continued, with English football and Manchester United becoming more commercial and corporate in nature, the effects on match-going supporter culture became even starker, to the extent that it was becoming increasingly difficult for fans to turn a blind eye to what was happening. The atmosphere, camaraderie and feelings of even ad-hoc community could no longer be sustained for the temporary period of the match, such had been the changes in crowd dynamics, demographics and environment inside the stadium.

When the long-running battle to prevent Malcolm Glazer's takeover of Manchester United was lost in 2005, many fans who had campaigned and protested on this and previous issues were faced with a watershed moment. Not only was their club now in the hands of an owner

who made no pretence to 'care' about the history or tradition of the club and its supporter culture, but the club would be forced to maximise commercial operations in order to finance the highly-leveraged borrowing that underpinned Glazer's purchase. More disheartening for these fans however, was the eventual realisation that there was clearly insufficient appetite for resistance amongst the club's wider fan base.

That imaginary schism these fans had nurtured between how they wanted to see the club and the reality of its corporate policies, had now grown so large that it appeared irreparable. The fans now faced an unsettling moment of truth: this had become for many a 'now or never' issue, and with the club now seemingly heading in a direction that would make what had already turned out to be futile resistance efforts even more impotent, they faced a tough choice. They could either shrug their shoulders and make that eye permanently blind by continuing to support the team as before, or they could 'walk away' in the knowledge that such an ongoing compromise in their principles would be unbearable, even if they could afford it financially.

In an issue of the United We Stand fanzine that appeared during the 2005-06 season, Mark O'Brien, of Everton fanzine 'When Skies Are Grey' and author of 'What's Our Name? Everton!', was interviewed and asked for his thoughts on the fans' turmoil in Manchester surrounding the Glazer takeover. His observation revealed an uncomfortable truth: *"its quite interesting watching goings on at United at the moment, as a lot of the issues go to the very heart of what being a supporter is all about. It seems like United fans are being asked to confront head on all the little lies that football fans tell themselves all the time"* (UWS, 2005c: 41).

It obviously takes something that is very significant and extremely complex, and therefore remarkably difficult to define, for football fans to let anything threaten or disrupt the loyalty they feel to their club. The Manchester United fans who eventually set up their own independent football club had experienced a gradual, and perhaps unique, development before they reached the stage where 'blind loyalty just wouldn't cut it anymore'. When they did as the above observer described and reflected critically on the tales they had been telling themselves, they realised that they couldn't any more avoid a more honest appraisal of these stories. In future when they told these stories, they didn't want them to be lies.

Alongside the *'love the team, hate the club'* sensibilities, a more empowering perspective

had been gradually developing amongst participants in Manchester United's independent fan culture, which posited that a football club is embodied most tellingly not by its owners, nor its manager or even its players, but by its fans. It was the fans that made a football club what it really was in the minds of these supporters, and this belief had lain at the heart of all campaigns which sought to maintain the club's traditional match-going culture. It was an intense reliance on this notion that led Manchester United fans to believe that they could survive and prosper as a cultural entity away from the suffocating shelter of what they now saw as the corporate, commercial 'shell' of Manchester United.

For these fans, it wasn't so much that the notion of loyalty was being cast aside, but that their idea of what constitutes loyalty had changed. The supporters who decided to boycott Manchester United did so because they believed that only by removing their financial, physical and symbolic support for the current regime, could they effectively register their strong opposition to it. They felt passionately that this course of action was in the best long term interests of the club, and so for these fans, far from being disloyal, they were sacrificing their cherished status as match-goers for the benefit of their club.

The loyalty being shown by the boycotting fans then was of a different kind than the 'blind', submissive loyalty that has characterised traditional discourse of supporter authenticity. They were instead being loyal to a fairly abstract notion of how they now saw the club, separated from the *'bricks and mortar'* of the stadium and the personnel who happened to be so privileged to be wearing 'the shirts' or 'the suits' at that time, and more in line with their own political and cultural perspective of how the club could and should be organised and run.

FC United of Manchester were formed on this basis, in the fans' eyes as the football club that would represent the true cultural, social, ethical and political values of its core support. This was seen initially by some as a temporary measure, to sustain the fans during their boycott of Glazer's Manchester United, but the depressing realities of the situation - principally the apathy, ambivalence and even hostility of other United fans - meant that most soon understood this had to be seen in a more permanent light.

Many critics would have preferred fans to quietly 'make their own choice' like so many had done before, disappearing out of sight and out of mind of those still funding that which they profess to oppose. That however would have been to *individualise* the cultural and political contradictions with which the fans were faced. Instead, by setting up a visible focal point for

continued collective protest, and importantly match-day culture, fans chose to *socialise* the solution in the form of FC United. This was by no means ideal, as after all it had, as one FC United board member commented at a particularly tense members' meeting, come out of *'conditions not of our own making'*, but given these circumstances it did allow Manchester United fans to produce and consume a cultural 'habitus' that no longer had to conflict with their wider social, cultural and political principles.

The very deep, emotional soul-searching that surrounded many fans' decisions on whether to keep supporting or to boycott Glazer's United is an extremely important aspect of this issue for two main reasons. Firstly, it highlights the depths of feeling that fans build up around their identity as supporters of their club, and therefore how difficult it is for them to take any decision that may disrupt or threaten those identifications. Secondly, it illuminates the extremely complex and often contradictory formations of commitment and affiliation that must be understood, or at least respected, in any attempts to present an alternative future to men and women living in what Bauman calls *'liquid modern'* society (Blackshaw 2005).

Perhaps the most striking feature of the reflective contemplation undertaken by those who chose the FC United route was that of a sense of new found freedom in taking such a step into the unknown. Public meetings were observed as being akin to 'alcoholics anonymous' meetings, with distraught fans taking it in turns to step forward and publicly declare, for example *"I've been goin' United for over thirty years, an' I can't imagine not going, but I can't…I'm gonna do it, I'm givin' it up"*[22]. The feeling has been described as at once frightening and liberating, as at last the sense of confusion felt over competing notions of loyalty and political principles were cast off, and suddenly the differences between right and wrong became clearer than ever. For the fans that had campaigned and protested, written and marched, shouted and sang, flashmobbed and barricaded, invaded and disobeyed, stood and sat, read and researched, organised and dreamt, this had indeed been a *'shaping walk'* (Brady, 2006).

The events observed and analysed throughout reveal that even within a sphere of cultural life which many see as either a peripheral, depth-less leisure pursuit, or entertainment which deflects people's attention away from wider social injustices, engagement with wider

[22] Quote taken from author's participant observation notes (19th May 2005). The public meetings immediately following the Glazer takeover proved to be vitally important forums for not only airing grievances and concerns, but for fostering a realisation that 'something was happening' and therefore helping to mobilise the fans into collective action.

political struggle is a possibility, given the right circumstances. It is equally clear that mobilisation and organisation must come from the people themselves, though the influence of those with existing political awareness and campaigning experience, along with an authentic engagement within the cultural field is surely pivotal - akin in some ways to the notion of *'organic intellectuals'* (Gramsci, 1971) or perhaps Bourdieu's (1984) depiction of *'cultural intermediaries'* .

Blind Loyalty

Loyalty is the concept that most notably provides the rationale for many football fans in stopping short of more active forms of resistance. Part of this involves a ready mobilisation of the sentiment that loyalty must be displayed 'through thick and thin', which extends to the highs and lows brought by financial speculation. This uncritical alignment of on-pitch fortunes with the off-pitch concerns now increasingly faced by fans, reveals that static notions of authentic fandom that were more suited to traditional modes of supporter engagement in English football, are now no longer fit for the purpose of supporter cultures that seek to defend their own class interests.

By refusing to include such politicised supporter actions as boycotts within conceptions of authentic fandom, football's loyalists can do little else but offer up their cherished loyalty *"at the altar of commercialism"* (MEC, 2004b), thereby aligning with the powerful interests that protesting fans seek to oppose. This represents a challenge for supporters with a stake in opposing the commodification of their culture, exposed now more clearly than ever, via the stark free market reduction of football clubs to mere profitable means for the speculative ends of wealthy investors. Supporters therefore must reconcile their own interests as fans with what they see as the long-term interests of their club if, that is, fans want the *'stories we tell ourselves about ourselves'* to be true.

A deep introspection of football supporters' 'little lies' was a pivotal requirement for those Manchester United fans contemplating their position in the summer of 2005. Supporters were being asked to think about the relationship they have with their club, about the true nature of their attachments, about what Bourdieu termed their *doxa* – the knowledge we think with but not about (Blackshaw, 2005). For many, this revealed uncomfortable truths to which they had previously managed to turn a blind eye.

Post-deferential sensibilities

While the emancipatory possibilities of such introspection are clear for the already or subsequently politicised supporters of FC United of Manchester, the discomfort felt in what is revealed can not be so easily passed over. A concern for many fans has been a demystification of their support for their team, in that by taking their affiliation apart in order to see the inner workings, reassembly may not be so straightforward.

The same doubts must also occur for any researcher who seeks to contemplate the underlying truths of their own cultural world. The fear of fatally uprooting a plant just to reveal how it lives, likely accompanies any such experience. In my case however, this close examination has accompanied a simultaneous process amongst other participants in the same cultural world, which perhaps goes some way to allay these anxieties.

FC United fans, certainly initially, worried that they may have lost the possibility for those 'liminal' moments described by Victor Turner (1969) in which fans could be lost, carried away on an emotional roller-coaster when supporting their team. Passengers on a roller-coaster tend not to want to think too carefully about the nuts and bolts keeping them in place, and would definitely prefer not to see any patches of rust, or anything that might interrupt their willing suspension of disbelief. There is after all something to be said for the naïve enjoyment of being taken for a ride, and for FC United fans, while now happy to be in control of their own journey, a part of them perhaps still occasionally wants to be able to close their eyes, put their hands in the air and enjoy the ride.

As it turned out, there would be plenty of occasions to allay supporters' concerns that just because they knew how it worked, and had built it themselves, they wouldn't get the same enjoyment out of it. As FC United fans got to know their new team, the inevitable ups and downs soon saw supporters losing themselves in the various disappointments and celebrations that came along. Crucially, when it came to finding themselves again they still liked what they found, as in between the occasional extremes FC United fans are now, with both eyes open, able to see themselves, as Marx attested, in a world they have created.

The fans of FC United then have arguably created a sense of community that was lacking in their compromised support for Manchester United. The fissures that existed within such a big club's support are perhaps not surprising, not just given the recent transformations in top-level English football and the changing demographics of football crowds, but also due to

what Bauman described as *"the feebleness, weakness, brevity and frailty of bonds"* (Rojek, 2004: 301) within the more fluid environment of 'liquid' modernity (Bauman, 2000).

Ironically though, those who most deride the boycotting fans often cite close, long-standing attachments that they feel are too strong to break as they rationalise and justify their refusal to boycott. Such emotionally-charged proclamations of undying affiliation certainly present barriers to protesting fans who seek to encourage others to grasp the power they collectively, potentially, hold. The real problem then, as Bauman would no doubt attest, is that the 'loyalist' fans' sentiments and actions are indicative of 'liquid' modern responses, in which fleeting, convenient *ad hoc* or *peg* communities are inappropriately imbued with rhetoric romantically gleaned from traditional conceptions of community (Bauman, 2001b).

Many of the traditional notions dear to football fans, of working class communities, of a reciprocal bond between club and supporters, and even between supporters themselves, certainly at elite levels of contemporary English football, tend only to exist in the rhetoric of marketing initiatives and the performances of fans. Sartre's notion of 'bad faith' reflects well observations made here of what was for many 'loyalist' fans a defensive celebration of tradition, authenticity and loyalty in justifying a decision to go along with changes which threaten those very things.

Sorren Kierkegaard's recognition of modernity as a 'reflective age of stifling sentiment' (Poole and Stangerup, 1989) rings true in such debates, in which a tendency towards passive inaction, justified by the very values which the permanently-postponed action is designed to represent, often spills into 'ressentiment'. Boycotting fans are therefore vilified and even blamed for some of the symptoms they seek to address, such as the contention that 'they are walking away just when the club needs them most'. FC United has certainly been cast in such a light by critics keen to maintain that loyal fans must bravely 'stay and fight', whereas to 'walk away' is cast as the cowardly, easy option.

Reluctance to take purposeful action was certainly a telling symptom of the ambivalence fans experienced, representing a daunting task even for those who would eventually become involved with FC United. This was especially apparent during a public meeting at Manchester's Apollo Theatre in May 2005, at which many fans sought more clearly mapped-out pathways than those put forward by the FC United 'steering group'. The lack of pre-determined outcomes to potential future scenarios meant that for many, the ambitious

prospect of a fan-owned football club was regarded as a naïve, utopian dream.

"Someone who writes nothing but postcards will not have Hegel's problem of how to end his book"

Richard Rorty (cited in Bauman, 1991: preface)

For many, it is clear that an ability to embrace ambivalence does not come easily, and the attraction of maintaining even irrevocably flawed long-standing relationships is equally clear in the face of novel risk and uncertainty. However, for those seeking to understand the role that culture plays in fostering participants' understandings in such turbulent situations, acknowledging the ubiquity of ambivalence is vital.

In light of these observations, culture can usefully be seen as a conversation between the possible and the practical, a yearning for what we could be, while simultaneously fearing what might be lost. Ivan Turgenev's 'Fathers and Sons' for example, reveals that the complex role played by culture is not something particularly new. In the novel, older men criticise the younger generation's 'blinkered' opposition to European influences being so avidly embraced as they were in Russia at the time. Along with technological, scientific and cultural progress that had come from the West also came new forms of oppression, and so resistance to the latter was automatically aligned with culturally regressive tendencies. That no simple solution presented itself therefore became the rationale for a passive 'come what may' consensus.

The neoliberal character of globalising forces impacting upon Mancunian football culture has meant that attempts of supporters to defend themselves have been caught up in similar complexities. Throughout the research, the cultural attachments of social actors have consistently produced as many questions as they have answers. Fear of losing even those aspects of culture fans could already see, or perhaps refuse to see, slipping away, was enough for many to avoid the risk of taking a course of action that had no certainties.

As explored throughout the previous chapters, this entwined relationship between 'progress' and 'exploitation', as demanded by neoliberal doctrine, has resulted in attempts at resistance being condemned as regressive, parochial, and even xenophobic. Christopher Merrett's (2001) recognition of how this tactic is routinely employed by capitalism's cheerleaders is extremely useful in laying bare the wider political and economic interests that dominate interactions between the local and the global. Merrett's observation that local opposition

often in fact takes on more progressive modes of organisation, such as democratically-run co-operatives, is therefore an outcome that those with interests tied up in the corporate world are keen to mis-represent.

In football, where rivalry and entrenched identities are prominent structuring elements, along with those 'little lies' supporters tell themselves, antagonism towards those 'doing' or 'being' what football fans often say they are, is perhaps to be expected. The Manchester United 'loyalists', such as those behind the 'Judas Scum' taunts, and even manager Alex Ferguson, clearly do not welcome the ongoing, very visible existence of the boycotting and otherwise disenfranchised Manchester United supporters now at the fans' co-operative FC United. Tellingly, at the club's first public meeting one inspiring speaker promised that the fans' club would prove to be a *'beacon of shame'* to Glazer's Manchester United, and one board member has spoken of FC United as representing, in Noam Chomsky's words, *'the threat of the good example'*.

Communities of Resistance?

While Bauman may be just as reluctant to use the notion of community to describe FC United as he would other football clubs, fearing the lack of any genuine prospect in the contemporary world for what might be considered an authentic community, the close bonds can certainly be described as more substantial among the 'collectivity' (Blackshaw, 2008) of FC United supporter-owners than was the case in the relatively atomised environment they left behind.

That these close bonds were largely forged in protest is of little surprise given the potential transformative effects identified for participants in active campaigns of resistance (Barker, 1996). It is perhaps this element that allowed fans to overcome the *"formidable barrier"* of what the likes of Putnam and Sennett have argued are now less public, more passive and individualised relations. These contemporary, consumer-oriented social conditions are primarily what Jurgen Habermas felt were standing in the way of "*translating whatever oppositional discourses are generated from cultural consumption into effective and organised political resistance"* (Gibson, 2000: 262).

While certain outlooks are clearly shared within FC United's support, fundamental disagreements were also apparent around notions of the 'political', and in particular how overtly 'political' the club should be. Even therefore amongst a fan base founded upon a

shared ethos of left-leaning political principles, weaved together as it is - often somewhat awkwardly - with an enlightened and post-deferential sense of affiliation to Manchester United, a definite and strongly held anti-politics stance persists for some. These fault lines in the broad consensus that holds the FC United supporter 'community' together, must be contemplated with the understanding set out above of culture's ambivalent and often ambiguous character, alongside an awareness that influences on individual perspectives come from both within the field of Mancunian football culture and also from the wider social conditions within which this culture exists.

That FC United hasn't developed into a wholly discrete, homogeneous, stridently politicised football culture should perhaps be counted as a blessing, in that any longer-term aims of being just one amongst a flourishing network of supporter-run football clubs will require the negotiation of obstacles that, for now at least, are bolstered by a lack of understanding of, and appetite for, the changes which FC United would like to see elsewhere in football.

Calls to 'leave your politics at the door' are heard in all walks of life, as being seen to have a political 'agenda' is often viewed with suspicion and cynicism, whether in sport, education, the media and even in politics. Fostering a cultural environment in which a fear of 'taking sides' is surmounted, and local symptoms can be unashamedly linked to their wider, structural causes, is important for any social movement which seeks to look out for the interests of those it seeks to represent.

Observations of 'common sense' cultural understandings that discourage purposeful action evoke the image of the *"mind-forg'd manacles"* within the poetry of William Blake. While such manacles can be seen to persist in these ways of understanding 'our place' in the world, Simmel's prognosis of this 'tragedy' of culture importantly offers the hope that cultural engagement may also reveal the keys that might encourage the imagination of alternative futures.

An observation of relevance here is the ongoing desire by some FC United fans to maintain more passive modes of support, whether of Manchester United or FC United. Some fans for instance 'do both' by alternating attendance at each club's matches, while others choose to be a supporter of FC United without wishing to take on the status or responsibility of member-owner. Some will choose a televised Manchester United game over live attendance at an FC United match, and heated debates await any decision on the provision of satellite television

when the club builds its own home. The more tentative steps some have therefore taken in their 'journey to FC United' betray again the strong allure of 'reaching back' towards long-held cultural sensibilities and habits. These 'locally residual' positions (Williams, 1977: 125) adopted by some fans can also be viewed as a particularly stubborn remnant of Marx and Engels' *'muck of ages'* , those aspects of our lives that come with an inherent stake in holding onto systems, institutions or ideas that serve to maintain the status quo (Barker, 1995).

Implications and Further Research

Although satisfied with the geographical and conceptual limits of this research project, it is recognised that the implications of the findings could have potential resonance for not only wider cultural fields of football fandom and sport in general, but also for the everyday cultural engagement people have with the media, education and also more explicitly political social movements.

Having reflected extensively on the research methods employed, in conducting future research there would be a concerted aim for greater efficiency in time and resources, and notably in establishing a clear focus from the outset, in order to avoid repeating the costly, particularly time-wise, process of the eventual focus emerging as a result of the many, many hours immersed in the research field. While this has been a valuable experience on many levels, it is not something which can be repeated for future research projects, even if it were desired. Which it is most certainly not.

In line with the epistemological values reflected upon in earlier chapters, there also remains a wish to disseminate the key findings of this thesis with a view to making it accessible to a wider audience than academia. This would primarily focus on those with most at stake in the issues at the heart of the thesis. This however is a task to be considered in more detail at a later date, should the work be deemed to have met the standards required of a doctorate thesis.

Concluding Thoughts

FC United, and independent supporter movements generally, are in too early a developmental stage to have their success or otherwise in providing alternative futures for football fans determined emphatically. Likewise, it would be foolish to expect that such mobilisations of fans will automatically awaken in their participants a wider appreciation of

political issues, nor indeed any deeper engagement in ‘politics’ beyond the relatively narrow confines of the football industry.

What this case does reveal is the social and political value of seemingly narrow ‘cultural struggles’, in that when the areas of our lives that mean most to us come under attack, and for many these are what may have previously been considered as ‘peripheral’ leisure and cultural pursuits, there can be a real desire to fight for them. The ambivalence of cultural engagement, recognised in different ways by thinkers such as Williams, Bauman, Simmel, Levi-Strauss and Foucault, means that the possibility will always exist for cultural formations to meaningfully oppose dominant structures. As hegemonic values come to be challenged however, that same culture, as Gramsci identified, also contains deep-lying tendencies towards consent.

Importantly, Gramsci was also careful to acknowledge that meaningful counter-hegemony can be created within cultural movements not generally considered to be 'political'. This is particularly relevant for modern, 'developed' societies where explicitly politicised links to revolutionary or emancipatory struggle can appear alien to the relatively comfortable experiences of ordinary men and women (Williams, 1977).

For those with a stake in encouraging such individuals to ‘get involved’ in opposing dominant structures, this thesis has attempted to shed some new light on not only the stubborn, limiting, character of deeply-held cultural affiliations, but also the possibilities for meaningful resistance that lie alongside them, in order to better understand the processes that make the disenfranchised either sit down meekly or take a stand.

APPENDIX 1

Newcastle City Council

11 November 2004

Dear Manchester United Supporter

As you are aware in recent times there has been a national debate over the safety issues associated with spectators who continually stand at Sports Grounds that have been designed for all seated accommodation.

Newcastle United Football Club (Safety Certificate Holder) in conjunction with Newcastle City Council (Certifying Authority) are currently considering the effectiveness of measures aimed at encouraging spectators to refrain from standing, but accept situations such as goals being scored and goal mouth incidents will no doubt lead to spectators standing to celebrate the occasion and it is essential that this period of standing is kept to a reasonable level.

The purpose of this letter is to ask for your assistance in ensuring that standing at St James Park is kept to a minimum to protect the safety and convenience of those supporters who wish to follow their team.

You will be aware that a reduction in the allocation of tickets for away supporters has been introduced by certain premiership clubs and at this point in time Newcastle United are considering this option if the difficulties associated with spectators who stand in a designated seating area continue.

Your behaviour today is to be closely monitored and your actions in respect of continued standing during the duration of the match could be instrumental in you or a fellow supporter being unable to attend this fixture in the future if a subsequent decision is made to reduce away support allocation.

Newcastle United are keen to welcome all away supporters to St James Park and their presence adds to the atmosphere within the stadium and we would wish to avoid a situation whereby away support is reduced to minimal numbers.

The future attendance of the current number of Manchester United supporters at this fixture rests with you.

Appendix 1.1: Letter handed to visiting Manchester United supporters at St. James' Park, home of Newcastle United FC

Appendix 1.2: Notice handed to visiting Manchester United supporters at Highbury, home of Arsenal FC

Middlesbrough Football Club

BT Cellnet Riverside Stadium

Middlesbrough, TS3 6RS

The Safety Certificate and Ground Regulations issued to Middlesbrough Football Club requires that all spectators remain seated whilst play is in progress.

Stairways and aisles must be kept clear at all times.

Smoking is not permitted in the seated areas of the BT Cellnet Riverside Stadium.

We look forward to your full co-operation during your visit to Middlesbrough.

Appendix 1.3: Notice handed to visiting Manchester United supporters at the Riverside Stadium, home of Middlesbrough FC

APPENDIX 2

You are being ripped-off!

Birmingham City FC has charged you and all other Manchester United supporters £45 for their tickets today.

- That is £17 more than Crystal Palace fans will have to pay in the same part of the ground in 2 week.
- That is 50p per minute.
- That is wrong.

Show your contempt for the exploitation of United supporters by Birmingham City by boycotting all commercial activity inside the ground:

- Don't buy a pint before the match or at half time at the ground
- Don't buy any food or drinks from the kiosks at the ground
- Don't buy a match programme for the game today

If they insist on profiteering at the expense of United fans, hit them where it hurts: in the pocket.

Appendix 2: Leaflet handed out by IMUSA to Manchester United supporters at St. Andrew's, home of Birmingham City FC

APPENDIX 3

We'll Never Die!
Fight Glazer's Occupation of Manchester United

The *Independent Manchester United Supporters Association*, *Shareholders United* and the fanzines *Red Issue*, *Red News* and *United We Stand* - who together represent tens of thousands of Manchester United fans - remain implacably opposed to the purchase of Manchester United Plc by the Malcolm Glazer family.

We regard the Glazer family as in temporary occupation of Old Trafford. We are calling on all Manchester United fans to continue the fight against Glazer and to unseat him from Old Trafford. Reclaim the club!

We have all been angry at the purchase of our club as if it were a mere commodity; we are angry at what he is going to do to the club in order to repay his colossal debts; we are angry at the exclusion of supporters interests. But anger is not enough, now is the time for action. Glazer's business plan is based on a knife edge. It's time for us to show that the customer is king.

Below are a list of things that you can do to get Glazer out of our club. Keep Up the Fight! Here's TEN THINGS YOU CAN DO

1. Protest at the FA Cup Final

We are calling on all United fans to **dress in black** at the FA Cup Final, to mark the passing of Manchester United into the Glazer regime, to bring black banners and to leave nobody in any doubt about how we feel. We are fighting for the history and tradition of our club: this is a symbolic, peaceful protest which also respects the history and tradition of a competition in which United are the record holders.

- Assemble outside the Prince of Wales pub in Cardiff from 11.30 am on the day of the match.

2. Build for a Public Rally

It is intended to hold a public rally at the Apollo Theatre in Manchester. We need you to build for this by getting as many United fans you know to come. Help build the rally by leafleting at the Cup final on Saturday.

- Collect leaflets from the Prince of Wales pub in Cardiff from 11.30am.

3. Use Your Customer Power on Glazer

****Don't buy Club Merchandise**

Stop the money going to Glazer. Boycott all products from the club. This includes catering on match day, merchandise from the club shop and replica shirts and strips. Give back your Manchester United credit card and anything else from which Glazer will profit. Encourage other fans not to buy club product.

- Write to Manchester United Merchandising, Manchester United, Old Trafford, Manchester M16 0RA to tell them why you are boycotting their product.

****Cancel MUTV Subscriptions**

Stop the money going to Glazer. Many fans have already cancelled their MUTV subscriptions. You can do the same!

- Ring MUTV to cancel your subscription immediately and inform them why.

****Boycott the Club's Sponsors**

Make Glazer as unpopular as possible with the club's official sponsors and minimise Glazer's income from their association. Many fans have already cancelled Vodafone subscriptions and are vowing not to buy Nike products.

- Boycott all products and services from the following companies and write to let them know why you are doing so:

VODAFONE Mr Arun Sarin, Chief Executive, Vodafone Group PLC, Vodafone House, The Connection, Newbury, Berkshire RG14 2FN
NIKE, Mr Dan Loeb, General Manager, Nike (UK) Ltd, 1 Victory Way, Doxford Intl Business Park, Sunderland SR3 3XF
AUDI UK, Mr Kevin Rose, Managing Director, Audi UK, Yeomans Drive, Blakelands, Milton Keynes MK14 5AN
BUDWEISER Budweiser Consumer Department, Anheuser-Busch Europe Ltd, Freepost LON7267, Richmond TW9 2BR
CENTURY RADIO, Mr David Mansfield, Chief Executive, GCap Media PLC, 30 Leicester Square, London WC2H 7LA
FUJIFILM (UK), Mr Hiroshi Saigusa, Managing Director, Fujifilm UK, Fujifilm House, 125 Finchley Road London, NW3 6HY
LADBROKES Mr David Michels, Chief Executive, Hilton Group plc, Maple Court, Central Park, Reeds Crescent, Watford, Herts WD24 4QQ
PEPSI UK Mr Richard Collins, Director of Brand Marketing, Britvic House, Broomfield Road, Chelmsford CM1 1TU
SCHICK-WILKINSON SWORD Customer Relations, Sword House, Totteridge Road, High Wycombe, Bucks HP13 6EJ

(leaflet continued on next page…)

APPENDIX 3 (cont.)

4. Boycotting Matches

Many fans have already decided that they cannot renew their season tickets and give their money to Glazer, so they are boycotting matches. This is the most direct way of stopping Glazer getting his hands on our cash and stopping him succeeding. Others feel that they cannot stop going to the game, but have vowed to carry the fight on 'within'. We support the personal decisions of all fans who remain actively campaigning against Glazer.

5. Use Your Shareholder Power

If you're a private shareholder, your shares do count. Do nothing until you hear from Shareholders United. SU will be contacting you with further plans about what to do with your shares in the coming days.

- Contact Shareholders United at www.shareholdersunited.org or **0870 742 3025.**
- For those who have made the ultimate sacrifice please add your name to the list of fans giving up ST, LMTB and OU Membership at www.mufcrollofhonour.com

6. Call on Gill and the Boards to Resign

We want no cooperation with Glazer and call on leading staff not to become part of his machine.
We call on Chief Executive David Gill, the board of Manchester United Plc and the board of Manchester United Football Club to lead by example and to resign in protest at the take-over. We request that they do this at the earliest opportunity, as we do not see how they can continue to execute a business plan that they themselves describe as 'aggressive' and 'damaging'.

- *Write to them and urge them to resign:*

David Gill, Manchester United, Old Trafford, Manchester M16 0RA.

7. Make Glazer and His Backers Aware of Your Anger

We intend to make the Glazer project unworkable and you can help.

**Extraordinary General Meeting

In order for Glazer to make Manchester United a private company, he has to hold an Extraordinary General Meeting of all shareholders. We can protest at the EGM and, if too many of the 30,000+ small shareholders turn up, the meeting may have to be adjourned. If this happens again, it may have to be adjourned again. The longer the club remains out of his private hands, the more difficult it becomes for Glazer.

- Look out for the announcement of the EGM and turn up when it happens.

**Legal Challenge

Shareholders United are looking into a legal challenge to the take over in which any 50 (or more) shareholders can challenge Glazer's attempts to take the club private.

- For more information about how you can get involved, contact Shareholders United.

**Phones, Fax and Email

It would be most unfortunate for the smooth running of the Glazer regime if fans were to contact the club, all at the same time. As such we are calling on fans to be careful:

- Not to call phone lines and fax machines at the same time
- Not to send emails
- Not to order large numbers of unwanted products
- Not to telephone key staff so that they cannot help Glazer

We would also like to remind fans that under the Data Protection Act that they can demand from the club any information which is held on them within 28 days of a request.

- Write to the Chief Executive, Manchester United, Old Trafford, Manchester, M16 0RA to request a copy of all the data they hold on you.

8. Write in Protest

The take-over of an historic Manchester institution by an American corporate raider has been allowed to happen because of a lack of proper regulation on who is allowed to own football clubs in this country. English regulations are far weaker than stronger leagues such as Spain and Germany where supporters have a controlling interest to protect the club. The Glazer take over now threatens the very fabric of English football.

- Write to express your anger at the take-over and call for the regulatory bodies to act against it:
  - Premier League: Richard Scudamore, Chief Executive, FAPL, 12 Connaught Place, London W2 2ET
  - FA: Brian Barwick, Chair, The FA, 20 Soho Square, London W1D 4FA
  - Prime Minister, Tony Blair, 10 Downing St, London SW1A 2AA
  - Sports Minister: Richard Caborn, Minister for Sport, DCMS, 2-4 Cockspur St, London SW1Y 5DH
  - Your MP, c/o House of Commons, Westminster, London SW1A 0AA

9. Challenge the Media

Some in the media are saying that the protest is over and that Glazer's take-over is complete. We need to keep reiterating our opposition to it and to make sure the media are aware of the scope of actions which we will be undertaking under the next few months. Glazer's people will also be spinning against us. ANYTIME you hear the media mis-representing the campaign against Glazer's company, or assumptions that there is nothing fans can do, phone, write, text and email and tell everyone what is going on. Also, support those in the press who are backing us.

10. Contact and Join Us:

- www.imusa.org
- www.shareholdersunited.org
- www.redissue.co.uk
- www.rednews.co.uk
- www.uws.co.uk

Appendix 3: Leaflet handed out by the 'Not For Sale' coalition at public meeting, Methodist Hall, Manchester, 19/05/05 (one week after Glazer's takeover of Manchester United)

APPENDIX 4

Football Club United of Manchester

The Manifesto: Who We Are and What We Mean

FC United of Manchester is a new football club founded by disaffected and disenfranchised United supporters.

Our aim is to create a sustainable club for the long term which is owned and democratically run by its members, which is accessible to all the communities of Manchester and one in which they can participate fully. Although driven by very different circumstances, *FC United of Manchester* takes as its inspiration a number of supporters' groups who have gone down this route, including AFC Wimbledon, who have offered unstinting support.

FC United of Manchester is intended to create a football club which addresses the concerns which many United fans have had over the last decade or more with how the club and football have developed, culminating in the club's takeover by Malcolm Glazer. We will follow the best traditions of Manchester United's past by developing policies which encourage youth participation in terms of both playing and supporting.

FC United of Manchester will be formed as a member-owned, democratic, and not-for-profit entity on the Industrial and Provident Society company model. The EGM will focus on the election of a board of directors by the members, and the direction of the club over the coming season.

We have ambitious and long term plans. Above all we want to be seen as a good example of how a club can be run in the interests of its members and be of benefit to its local communities. However, we are a new club and will require patience in order to reach our goals. With the help of all our members and supporters we are confident we can achieve them.

Seven core principles of how the club will operate are set out below, and once agreed by the membership, will be protected by all elected Board members:

1. The Board will be democratically elected by its members.
2. Decisions taken by the membership will be decided on a one member, one vote basis.
3. The club will develop strong links with the local community and strive to be accessible to all, discriminating against none.
4. The club will endeavour to make admission prices as affordable as possible, to as wide a constituency as possible.
5. The club will encourage young, local participation - playing and supporting - whenever possible.
6. The Board will strive wherever possible to avoid outright commercialism.
7. The club will remain a not-for-profit organisation.

Appendix 4.1: FC United of Manchester - The Manifesto

FC UNITED OF MANCHESTER

Inaugural Extraordinary General Meeting
Report from the Steering Group July 5 2005

The Steering Group of FC United of Manchester would like to ensure that all members are aware of the key developments made so far. Before doing so, the Steering Group would first like to thank all those who have joined, pledged, paid, advised, moaned, trialled and volunteered for boring jobs - quite simply we wouldn't be here today without you.

Below we outline progress made to date on the key issues of developing the club. We have had to take a lead on these tasks due to the very tight timetable in which the club has been formed but we have consulted with the membership whenever possible. However, we would like to make it clear that the future of the club and its further progress will be dependent on the active involvement and participation of its members - whether that is volunteering for jobs, offering services, organising meetings, getting new supporters joined up, backing the team or whatever. We need you. You are the club. The club is you.

1. NAME
The name of the club was put to a vote by all those who had pledged support. On a closing date of June 13th the result was overwhelmingly in favour of Football Club United of Manchester.

2. COMPANY
FCUM will be an Industrial and Provident Society (IPS). This is the model supported by Supporters Direct who have helped us in setting up. This means that:

- Every member has a vote.
- The board of Directors will be elected by the membership on a one member one vote basis.
- Any surplus will be reinvested in the club.

This decision will be ratified by the EGM where a fuller explanation of what this means and why it is beneficial to us will be made.

The company was formed following the Steering Committee's development and adoption of a viable business plan for the club's first year.

3. THE BOARD
The Steering Group of FCUM is just that, a steering group to get the club established in time for the 2005/06 season. The Board of FCUM will be elected at the EGM by its members. The Steering Group invited nominations to stand to be received by June 28th and all those that did are up to be elected at the EGM.

4. FA REGISTRATION
FC United of Manchester was registered as a bone fide football club with the Manchester County Football Association on June 14th 2005. We would like to thank the Manchester FA for their help.

5. LEAGUE
FCUM was accepted to play in the Moore and Company Solicitors Construction League Second Division (North West Counties League) from the start of the coming 2005/06 season at their AGM on Saturday June 18th 2005. We would like to thank the League officals and all its members for their help.

6. PLEDGES
The Steering Group asked Manchester United fans to back the proposed new club. We set up a web-based pledge system through which thousands of people have pledged support and donated money to the club. To date over £100,000 has been donated to help the cost of starting FCUM.

7. MEMBERS
All those who have pledged and/or paid a donation to help FCUM get off the ground will be a founding member of the club, a member for the 2005/06 season and eligible to vote at the EGM.

8. MANAGER
The Steering Group appointed Karl Marginson and assistant Phil Power to be the first manager of FCUM on Wednesday 22nd June.

9. TRIALS
The Steering Group and the management team held public trials for the team on Sunday 26th June at Manchester University. This was advertised through the press and website and over 900 people applied, way over what we could cope with on the day. An initial selection was made by the management on the basis of experience and 205 people were eventually trialled, with 18 going forward to pre-season training with the squad.

10. GROUND
FC United of Manchester have reached a ground share agreement. which is currently subject to final legal tweaking. We have explored every opportunity in the Greater Manchester area and this option provides us with the necessary requirements. Ahead of the final legalities the Steering Committee is not able to officially announce the venue, but we trust that the club's Board will be able to do so within the next couple of days.

11. STRIP
The Steering Group have extensively explored a number of options and we now have a kit supplier who will provide home, away and training kits, as well as produce replicas for sale. FC United of Manchester will have a home strip of red shirts and white shorts; and an away strip of white and black top and black shorts.

12. BADGE
The Steering Group have considered a number of options for badges and consulted with a wide range of people. For the EGM we have produced mock-ups of 3 badge designs which, as a democratic club, we will ask the members to vote on as the official club badge.

13. WEBSITE
The Steering Committee have constructed a web site as the main vehicle for communicating with members at very short notice. This site is now being expanded with news and discussion features and I at www.fc-utd.co.uk

THE STEERING GROUP IS:

Luc Zentar	Andy Walsh	Vasco Wakrill
Jules Spencer	Phil Sheeran	Tony Pritchard
John-Paul O'Neill	Peter Munday	Martin Morris
Tony Jordan	Andrew Howse	Russell Delaney
Adam Brown	Robert Brady	Phil Bedford
Mike Adams		

FC United of Manchester can be contacted via: **www.fc-utd.co.uk**
or
FC United, Suite 80, 792 Wilmslow Rd, Manchester M20 6UG

Appendix 4.2: FC United of Manchester – 'Steering Group' Report presented at the club's first general meeting

APPENDIX 5

"When FC United Come Out To Play.....

Saturday 29th December should have seen FC United of Manchester visit Curzon Ashton in one of the pivotal fixtures of the Season. Actually, Saturday 29th December will still see FC United of Manchester visit Curzon Ashton FC in one of the pivotal fixtures of the Season.

BUT will you be there?

Stupid question? After all, you're here today so why would you miss one of the most eagerly anticipated games of the Season? Well, are you aware that the League Management Committee has re-arranged the kick off to 12:45 from 15:00? Why have they done this? To suit the demands of their Internet TV channel, that's why!

During the Summer, League Officials gave assurances that no game would be moved for TV without the agreement of both Clubs taking part.

Both FC United and Curzon Ashton FC opposed this re-arrangement but the League have chosen to renege on their earlier assurances and are insisting that the game goes ahead at 12:45.

There have been issues since our formation that have divided opinion. That's a good thing because reasoned debate and a willingness to consider the views of each other are vital to our continuous development.

However, this issue is an opportunity for us all to UNITE behind an issue that was fundamental to the disillusionment which in the end led to the formation of Our Club. We can reinforce the message that we've had enough of our wishes being ignored and enough of decisions being made without considering how they inconvenience Supporters.

Every action has a reaction and this decision gives us an opportunity to demonstrate that supporters do have within their powers the ability to influence decisions.

We would urge you to join your fellow Owners/Supporters in making sure that we get the message across that the match-going Supporter should be placed at the forefront of considerations.

Therefore, please consider that the only effective way to make your feelings known is to boycott this fixture. It may be an important fixture on the pitch but for Our Club it's equally important off it!

Cheers, hopefully we won't see you there!

FANS > TV in association with the Supporters Network

.....It's 3 O'clock On Saturday"

Appendix 5: Leaflet encouraging FC United fans to boycott an away game at Curzon Ashton FC. The match had been moved for broadcast on the league's internet TV channel.

APPENDIX 6

Invitation to the United United Day.

On 8th October FC United are due to play against Daisy Hill at Gigg Lane in Bury and the FC United Supporters Group are holding a "United United" supporters day. It is an international weekend when England are playing and MUFC are not.

Therefore, we the supporters would like to extend an invitation to all United supporters who are opposed to Glazer, and are interested in a day of friendship, to accept an invitation to come and join fellow reds for a Saturday afternoon of football. Pay on the gate £7 adults and £2 for the kids.

For those who may have been doubtful towards FC United, why not come down to the game at Gigg lane and enjoy an afternoon of grass roots football. As United supporters we dislike the thought of United being split in two so we want you to visit us at least once, and this weekend is as good as any, with no Big United playing, then this is the time for you to come over and share in the atmosphere and revel in the fun, there is is a theme for a 70's togs days, with many bringing out their butchers coats, rattles, banners, flags and bar scarves.

Visit FC United, give it a try you may enjoy yourself and want to return for more ....There is plenty of United supporters who are currently doing both teams when they can because FC United is a broad church.

We don't want division any more than you do, what we want is the Gimp out. So many times in the past we have had to remind ourselves that UNITED WE STAND, DIVIDED WE FALL. The opportunity is upon us to let the world and the Gimp know we are not divided in our cause to be rid of him, its occasions like this that can be used to show this unity. Likewise with FC supporters who turnout for the co-ordinated peaceful protests via IMUSA. We are still a team of football supporters with a goal. No matter what strangers may say about us whether it be big or small, we are all still UNITED.

Several United supporters have come up with some grahic designs to advertise the day and these designs can be located at http://gcwebservices.co.uk/fcum/sg/utdutd.php

If you have any further enquiries regarding this event please email me at
contact.FCUMSG@fcunitedofmanchester.co.uk
or
events.FCUMSG@fcunitedofmanchester.co.uk

Appendix 6.1: Leaflet produced independently by fans attempting to encourage more Manchester United fans to attend an FC United game

FC UNITED PRESENTS the first ever...

DOUBLEVISION

SATURDAY 14th March 2009

MUFC vs. Liverpool 12.45pm
FCUM vs. Frickley Athletic 3pm

Watch Manchester United stuff the Scousers on TV at lunchtime, then head into Gigg Lane to cheer on FC United at 3pm!

Venues:

CYCM & The Main Stand Inn* (bars inside Gigg Lane) – all profits to FCUM
Bury FC Social Club – £1 entrance fee to FCUM
Pubs – Packhorse, Swan & Cemetery, Staff of Life, Waterloo

*FC United members only, one guest per member can be signed into CYCM

Make yours a double...

FC United. Fans and Football United

FOOTBALL CLUB UNITED OF MANCHESTER

Appendix 6.2: Leaflet advertising the screening of a Manchester United game before an FC United home fixture

APPENDIX 7

Protest against far right English Defence League!
Meet 10am, Saturday 10 October, Piccadilly Gardens!

FC United fans will be participating in the protests against this far right hooligan outfit coming to Manchester next Saturday. Together with other workers and youth, we have already been active in the movement against the BNP and Nick Griffin.

The English Defence League is a racist organisation. In past decades, Irish people got blamed for the ills of society, today Muslims bear the brunt. Our club does outstanding work in Manchester's most deprived areas, no matter if white, black, Muslim or otherwise. If the EDL had their way, this could not go on.

Our club is based on solidarity, standing together, ordinary people cooperating to build something special. If groups like the EDL had their way, none of this would be possible. The EDL have already threatened trade unionists after recent shambolic showings. Far right groups like the EDL are against all democratic rights, including the right to protest and the right to organise. A club like ours, grown out of a protest movement, would have no chance in the kind of society they envisage.

Supporting our initiative in a personal capacity, Andy Walsh commented: "The English Defence League are a divisive and bigotted organisation seeking to whip up a hate campaign designed to divide our communities."

We will organise a visible presence against these bigots next Saturday, participate in the protests and endeavour to guarantee the safety of those coming with us.
For more info and updates email
fcumfansagainstracism@yahoo.co.uk

Appendix 7: Leaflet handed out at an FC United fixture, by fans organising action against a march through Manchester city centre by the English Defence League (EDL)

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