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Against *Modern Football*: Mobilizing Protest in Rhizomatic Movements

Abstract

This article traces the grassroots lines of communication and mobilization that became the protest movement, *Stand Against Modern Football*. Previous studies show that football fans' social networks are divided by long-standing rivalries. *Stand Against Modern Football* breaks this trend, uniting diverse groups against the corporate programming of sport. We theorize the emergence of this rhizomatic social movement through Castells' conceptualizations of the 'programming' and 'reprogramming' of society. A participant-observation account illustrates how the communicative affordances of social media, and 'spaces of autonomy' established across online and urban locations translate into micro-political action through the mobilization of anger and hope as unifying forces. Our findings, however, critique and extend Castells' contributions to social movement studies by illustrating how rhizomatic movements remain connected to established social networks and conventional social movement organizations.

Introduction

This article critically engages with Manuel Castells' recent contributions to social movement research by examining Stand Against Modern Football (*StandAMF*), a network of association football fans that emerged in response to *'modern football'*, an expression of dissatisfactions regarding commercialization processes designed to generate more *desirable* ways of 'consuming' sport. Our analysis traces the grassroots lines of communication and mobilization within this movement to illustrate how contemporary social movements connect digital technologies and urban spaces in manners that overcome entrenched rivalries, and alter the power of protesters vis-à-vis corporate, media and political institutions.

In so doing, this study continues a line of research that explores mainstream sociological issues through sport cultures (Elias, 1986). Prior investigations of football and many other sports cultures have advanced perspectives on racism (Back et al., 1999; Burdsey, 2006; Woodward, 2004), homophobia (Cashmore and Cleland, 2012; Dashper, 2012), globalization (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2004) and aggression, violence and deviance (Armstrong and Harris, 1991; Dunning et al., 1988, Dolan and Connelly, 2014). Accordingly, we treat *StandAMF* as a context to gather evidence of how micro-political social movements emerge and develop, and to examine processes by which coalitions of communication, counterpower and protest are entangled with broader social, technological and economic orders.

Existing research into football protest movements reveals a context in which connections between supporters of different clubs are uncommon (King, 2002[1998]; Millward, 2011). This is unsurprising given the central role of clubs in enabling and maintaining socialisation, as well as creating distinctions and contested meanings between supporters (King, 2002[1998]; Nash, 2001). Despite this longstanding trend of rivalry and isolationism, however, *StandAMF* unites multiple fan groups, and channels shared affective

responses of previously isolated fans through communication networks that span online and urban space. For Castells (2012: 15), this characterises a "new species of social movement".

Unlike more traditional forms of collective action that require groups to regularly congregate so as to agree on purposes and renew shared identifications (e.g. Della Porta and Diani, 2009[1999]; Melucci, 1996), Castells (2012) asserts that digital communication technologies can 'switch on' connections between previously unrelated groups, renewing potential for social change by connecting coalitions of grassroots support with democratic processes. However, Castells is not without critics in respect of his appraisal of digital communication as generating new kinds of mobilization that improve the effectiveness of protest for social reform. Hence, we begin by describing Castells' claims regarding the status of contemporary social movements. Following this, we apply his analytical framework to our investigation of *StandAMF* in order to critically evaluate and extend his observations.

Manuel Castells and Contemporary Social Movements

Castells (1977: 93) defines social movements as a, "certain type of organization of social practices, the logic of whose development contradicts the institutionally dominant social logic". These logics - the practices and goals of social institutions - are *network*ed, i.e. they are shared and reproduced across multiple nodal materialities as diverse as people, objects, organisations, corporations, and cities. Networked logics must be *programmed*, or assigned, substantiated and distributed through communication structures. Although programs are irreducible to supporting communicative structures, Castells contends that networks and the social logics that they carry may be transformed – or 'reprogrammed' – through communicative activities. Moreover, Castells (2013[2009]) explains that although power has long emerged in social logics that are programmed through state, market and 'old' media

channels by privileged sectors of society, these enduring financial, political and media networks are increasingly open to reprogramming through 'new media'.

Connections between communication and power are a constant concern for Castells. In *The Information Age* trilogy (2009[1996]; 2010[1997]; 2010[1998]) he explains how power is manifest in material, social, cultural and 'informational' forms of capital afforded by digital technologies that produce a transnational 'space of flows'. Castells identifies this space of flows as generating novel possibilities for social movements to challenge the programming of longstanding network logics. Explicitly, in *Communication Power* (2013[2009]) and *Networks of Outrage and Hope* (2012) he presents case studies of macro-political movements to argue that developments in communication - most specifically Web 2.0/3.0 technologies - change how movements mobilize. In contrast to established, top-down modes of information dissemination long used to program entrenched network logics (Castells, 2010[1996]), these new channels encourage *horizontal networks*, "self-generated in content, self-directed in emission, and self-selected by many who communicate with many" (Castells, 2013[2009]: 70).

As examples Castells (2013[2009]; 2012) emphasises 'mass self-communication' channels i.e. Twitter, YouTube, Instagram and blogs. These horizontal networks allow "individuals and organizations to generate their own messages and content, and to distribute these in cyberspace, largely bypassing the control of corporations and bureaucracies" that have traditionally channelled flows of information in society (Castells, 2013[2009]: xx). Independent of established informational 'nodes', this open and fluid circulation of alternative logics across fluid networked coalitions, affords space for programs of resistance. Moreover, these communication orders transcend traditional time-space boundaries, such that new social movements increasingly connect people who share *ideas* rather than geographical place (Castells, 2010[1997]). It follows that these movements remain open-ended, defying

conventional membership-based measures of participation (Castells, 2012). Furthermore, Castells (2012) describes how this quality of mobilization leads to movements that are non-hierarchical and fluid, such that without central leadership they pose challenges to management and policing.

Together, these qualities lead Castells (2012: 15) to declare the emergence of a "new species" of social movement, *rhizomatic* movements. Grassroots in their emergence and growth, these connect potentially unlimited networks of parties through shared emotions in manners that enhance the potential to reprogram societal logics.

Despite Castells' optimism regarding this possibility, questions have been levelled at his theory. Fuchs (2012) suggests Castells overlooks networks that exist prior to a rhizomatic movement's mobilization; hence it remains unclear how these 'spontaneous' movements interact with established social movement organisations (SMOs), unions, or political parties as they progress. Further, as Gerbaudo (2012) suggests, it is not clear whether *rhizomatic* movements remain 'horizontal' and leaderless in their practical development, or whether these groups become institutionalised in manners that potentially become commensurate with or appropriated by existing power structures (Couldry, 2015). Finally, Mathers (2014) criticises Castells for considering expressive and affective motivations above instrumental goals and achievements. With these questions in mind, we ask to what extent *rhizomatic* movements can be characterised as a 'new species' of leaderless organizations that spontaneously emerge via digital media. To answer this question, and to critically develop Castells' recent contributions to understanding social movements, we investigate *StandAMF,* a protest movement that is attempting to reprogram the logic sustained by corporate and media interests in English football.

Method

To trace the emergence and development of *StandAMF,* a range of data-collection techniques were applied between December 2012 and November 2014. First, extended participation-observation occurred at social events organized by *StandAMF* and related events arranged by other associated groups. Secondly, ethnographic interviews and oral history procedures were deployed to build a more comprehensive, longitudinal and reflexive accounts of the events and cultural flows that precipitated the emergence and growth of this movement. Print and web-media published by *StandAMF* constituted a third source of data that allowed us to trace the communicative work carried out by protesters. Finally, we collected newspaper, blog, radio and web-media content featuring *StandAMF* and objections concerning 'modern football'. These sources were sampled to afford descriptions of historical precursors to *StandAMF*; the organizational micro-processes involved in the movement's development; and the flows of print and 'digital' content that sustain *StandAMF*. Our emphasis on recording the micro-processes of a social movement was designed to enable careful examination of Castells' claims regarding the emergence, structure and effectiveness of contemporary social movements.

Reprogramming 'Modern Football'

Contemporary debates about - and protests over - *modern football* should be contextualised within the history of 'crises' in English football. Attendances in England had fallen since the 1940s, leading Taylor (1984) to describe football as a sport in 'recession'. Additionally, during the 1970s and 1980s, football became synonymous with 'violence' – such that in May 1985, the *Sunday Times* declared it to be a "slum game played in slum stadiums watched by slum people" (Goldblatt, 2007: 542). Fast forward to August 1992, and in the wake of the

'disorder', and 'worthlessness' of the English game, interventions materialised that would change the way football was organized and consumed.

Riding a wave of enthusiasm following England's fourth place finish in the 'Italia '90' World Cup, the 'F.A. Premiership' was formed. In Castells' terms, this was a significant 'reprogramming' of English football. Castells (2013[2009]: 47) explains that programming involves constituting and communicating structures, and assigning goals to societal networks. To alter fan behaviour and increase revenue, club directors became key 'programmers' within the Premiership, building clubs as brands, asserting new practices of 'customer care', and transforming club ownership from a "philanthropic hobby' into an 'investment opportunity" (see King, 1997b: 227-228). This free-market program was substantiated and constitutionalized by the F.A's *Blueprint For the Future of Football,* which declared how, "High standards of behaviour, on and off the field" (The F.A., 1991: 6) could be fostered by socio-demographic marketing techniques designed to shift the core social class of crowds from, "C1, C2 and D to A, B and C1".

Programing new logics such as this requires communicative work to ensure a program is endorsed across nodes that constitute a societal network. Castells describes this work as accomplished by 'switchers' whose power lies in their ability, "to connect and ensure the cooperation of different networks by sharing common goals and combining resources" (Castells, 2013[2009]: 45). In the wider society, Castells (2013[2009]: 429) declares Rupert Murdoch to be "the most deliberate switcher", because of his capacity to link cultural, political and financial networks through his media empire. Indeed, Murdoch's control of *BSkyB* switched together Premiership football with the 'Sky Sports' channels, uniting league, clubs and broadcaster as marketing partners. *BSkyB* subsequently legitimised the new program of English football with advertisements that heralded the dawn of a '*Whole New Ball Game*'[i].

In 2012, the Premier League celebrated its 20th anniversary having carried football into a period of growing match attendances, lucrative broadcast deals (from the UK and overseas[ii]), and reduced instances of violence. Nevertheless, many fans were discontented. Exploring football fanzines from the late-1980s through to 2010, Millward (2011) discovers common frames of discontent: clubs prioritising commercial development ahead of on-the-pitch performances; a 'sanitisation' of match atmospheres following removal of stadium terraces; rising ticket prices that disrupt connections between 'traditional' fans and clubs; irregular kick-off times; a dilution in the 'meaning' of fandom; the heavy regulation of 'traditional' fan practices; and finally, connected to all of these, the growing influence of television broadcasters (especially *BSkyB*) on football (see also King, 1997a).

Despite these expressions of discontent, fanzine consumption remained constrained within the club-specific reach of these media (Millward, 2011). In the summer of 2012, however, on the web-forum of football related fashion label *Casual Connoisseur,* a discussion concerning the 're-branding' of *Cardiff City* sparked a broader debate about – in the words of one participant *Brighton and Hove Albion* fan Romeo Benetti – "how abjectly shit modern football in Britain is". The participants decided, "something had to be done" (in the words of fellow participant *Manchester City* fan, 'Macca')[iii]. A variety of similar conversations emerged in other web-forums: asked what he thought constituted 'modern football' in the Umbro blog, *Yeovil Town* supporter Seb White summarised:

> 'A game where fans are priced out from attending, where the young generation can neither afford or are able to get tickets, where people that do turn up receive over-the-top regulation from police and stewards, where owners act with complete disregard of supporters' views. Anything that takes the gloss of what can be a good day out at the match' (Umbro blog 2013).[iv]

To channel these expressions of discontent, White joined *Stockport County* follower Mark Smith, and *Liverpool* fan Daniel Sandison to publish a fanzine that could motivate support from fans who shared anger at the corporate logic guiding football. In large part, *StandAMF* establishes this motivation by comparing this current program with nostalgic recollections of the past, as the following statement by Sandison illustrates:

> 'There's an element of looking back […] and comparing it to how kids enjoy it today, it's a completely different experience. As football becomes more widely available in terms of both foreign influence and ownership, it becomes watered down and shipped away from original fans. Our ethos stems from money a lot of the time; people don't get a chance to watch their team because of the prices or the way tickets are distributed. There are vast swathes of people who are happy with modern football exactly as it is, but we want to highlight the plight of certain clubs, raise concerns and provide a basis for the minority.' (Sandison, quoted in Brand, 2012)[v]

This objection to foreign influences and ownership and nostalgic recollection of an era in which crowds were *less* likely to be diverse might appear ironic considering crowds remain largely 'white', often male, and assumed to be heterosexual. More problematically, this vision might evoke mono-cultural visions of British society that characterise how 'far-right' parties mobilize support (Rhodes, 2011). Although venerating the atmospheres and cheaper ticket prices of the past, however, *StandAMF* members are clear that they do not favour the pre-Premier League programme that was at times picketed by racist groups looking to recruit members. Rather, *StandAMF's* network of social media followers and event attendees include fans of from leftist (non-league) football club, *Dulwich Hamlet*, trade unionists, and members of anti-racist, antifascist, and anti-homophobic groups. Men and women feature among *StandAMF's* 15,700 Twitter followers, some 6000 Facebook followers, and at protest events.

As such, a heterogeneous network established from a diversity of other pre-existing networks begins to define *StandAMF* against previous ordering influences in English football, circumscribed as they were, by club-specific interests and orders (King, 2002[1998]; Nash, 2001). Like the social movements Castells (2012) describes, *StandAMF* reveals diverse roots. These include the 'Ultra' movement, young fans within continental Europe who are distinguished by their fanatical levels of support, and animosity towards corporate influences on European leagues (see Doidge, 2015). Further flows of mobilization stem from disparate club protest groups such as *Liverpool FC*'s *Spirit of Shankly* (SOS) supporter union, and multiple football fanzines (see Millward, 2011; 2012). Less clearly related, but equally important are cultural influences from the early-1990s electronic music and recreational drug scene (see Gilman, 1994), and the British football 'casual' fashion scene (see Redhead, 1991). Helping to generate a more inclusive and textured football culture since the 1990s (King, 1997a) these parallel cultural flows now support web-forums and events that steer clear of club rivalries. Instead, new discussions and opportunities for socialisation occur, as indicated above with fans from a variety of clubs discussing corporate influences on football brands within the *Casual Connoisseur* fashion blog.

Digital technologies such as these helped spread fans' dissatisfactions with English football. Seb White explains that, "within 24 hours of opening a Twitter account [*StandAMF*] had over a thousand followers" (interview, 13 February 2013). Subsequently, social media accounts became platforms for the heterogeneous supporter networks to deliberate over crises that emerge across the English football leagues, and to share their anger towards club directors, owners, the police, and media bosses, all of whom are perceived to sustain the logic of modern football. This possibility relies on the 'horizontal' affordances of Twitter and Facebook, Internet applications that bypass traditional 'top-down' media communications, allowing counter-veiling ideas to circulate unfiltered by the interests of established

programmers (Castells, 2012). Alongside the fanzine, *StandAMF* exists across multiple online spaces, and connects with the digital media of the various networks described in the previous paragraph.

Unity: From Ideology to Affect

Digital technologies helped *StandAMF* to unify spatially and temporally disparate lines of mobilization into an emergent network. *StandAMF* has become a node that unifies previously separate networks by pointing out what they all have in common: shared anger at the various interconnected ills of "modern football". Castells (2013[2009]) calls this work of unification, 'switching'. The *StandAMF* fanzine editors who accomplish this work are employed in the cultural industries - TV production, design and journalism – and are competent in exploiting the informational capital of media to unite the disparate networked influences. Given the diverse roots of the movement, and the assortment of complaints these groups express as effects of 'modern football', however switchers must take special care to translate across the multiple nodes of the emerging rhizomatic movement.

For Castells, this is often achieved by transcending single issues and identities that might define a movement (Castells, 2012). Fanzine editor Bill Biss is clear on this point: "we're not about one thing in particular, rather, *StandAMF* is attempting to give a voice to all those who've had enough with the various ills of the modern game. I also see it as a vehicle to protest, to moan, to debate, and to exchange ideas about what we can all do as fans to influence or change the future of football" (quoted in *The Pro Lounge* 2013[vi]). *StandAMF's* lack of singular origin or direction is arguably necessitated by the assorted origins and contributors to the movement. In contrast to SMOs with strict hierarchies, starting principles and well-defined goals, often materialized in constitutional documents (Zald and Ash, 1966),

StandAMF retains this open-endedness, exhibiting fluid goals, strategies, and structures, and eschewing firm principles of concern common to many social movements (see Martin, 2015).

This is not to say that attempts to constitutionalize *StandAMF* have not occurred. In 1999, an *AS Roma* Ultra placed an 'Against Modern Football Manifesto' on the Internet, to which 72 supporter groups pledged support (Numerato, 2014). Likewise, in July 2013, *StandAMF* published an online article entitled, "Time for a Manifesto", by activist Tom Reed. [vii] Despite issuing this manifesto, editor Seb White prefaced Reed's document by stating, "we don't agree with every single word [in the Manifesto]", and to date the movement remains without a firm constitution. How then are the voices of multiple groups with divergent meanings, concerns and engagements linked without manifestos or firm principles of identity?

In answer to this question, Castells (2012) cites the power of shared affect. Instead of contesting unwanted programs on firm ideological terrain, Castells (2012: 137) argues that rhizomatic social movements mobilize new members through shared emotional responses and by retaining openness to both emerging controversies, and to new groups that wish to join the movement. Hence, as membership grows, affective unity helps to intensify motivations with less risk of ideological disagreements. Illustrating these possibilities is Keith who describes *StandAMF* as, "a mood; it has no direction, which is a good thing in this case. Anyone from any club across the country can connect to it and use it in their own way" (interview, 16 May 2013). Keith suggests that *StandAMF*'s fluid identity helps the movement to bring diverse supporters together in a manner that can transfer broadly, and allow groups who become associated to respond to crises as they see fit.

StandAMF's fanzine and web presence are also seen to channel affect as a mobilizing force that generates hope. *Liverpool* fan, Anthony, considers that *StandAMF* produces a "feeling of *hope* that the way football is being run at the moment can be changed. It shows

that people out there regardless of team, club, league – whatever – are just as annoyed and angry" (interview, 17 February 2014). Like discussions that occur on topics unrelated to clubs that we considered above - such as fashion and music – the Internet-based sharing of emotions also helps to overcome entrenched rivalries. As such, *StandAMF* caters to fans from across the spectrum of English football culture.

Enhancing the unifying potential of horizontal communications to channel fans' shared anger online, however, *StandAMF* also brings people together in urban space. Castells (2012; 2013[2009]) asserts that although critical and reflexive work takes place in online space, 'urban' space allows movements to experience emotion together, and identify with one another in manners that *materialise* protest:

'Though these movements usually begin on the Internet, they are not identified as movements until they occupy urban space. […] The space of the movement consists of an interaction between the space of flows on the Internet and in wireless communication networks, and the space of places of the occupied sites and of symbolic buildings targeted by protest actions'. (Castells, 2013: xxxix)

Castells (2012: 222) contends that it is through an assemblage of urban space, personal proximity, and the circulation of collective emotions that groups create "spaces of autonomy", fluid and distributed practices of mobilization that span across online and urban locations. Spaces of autonomy generate and harbour the multiple concerns of newly united groups within the movement, and help to overcome trepidation, maintain enthusiasm, and produce hope in ways that begin to make protests concrete. *StandAMF* follows this blueprint. Beyond the publication of the *StandAMF* fanzine and social media presence, a number of urban events – including meetings, two protest marches, and post-march social events - took place between May 2013 and August 2014.

These events were organized by or associated with *StandAMF,* and included attendees from diverse clubs whose fans would not normally associate. Opening speeches, followed by speakers from the floor aroused collective anger at the effects of 'modern football'. As supporters from rival clubs came together to listen, discuss, and share their anger, these events became, as one participant put it, "tipping points" for further collective action. For instance, James McKenna, chair of Liverpool F.C. supporters' *Spirit of Shankly* protest group, declared that collaborations between *StandAMF* and other supporter organizations, "mark the coming together of fans in the realization of what unites us as supporters is greater than what divides us" (fieldnotes, 9 May 2013).

This statement is in stark contrast to Nash's (2001: 52) account of Kevin Miles' (now Chief Executive of the *Football Supporters Federation* (FSF) description of *Newcastle United* supporters' responses to the possibility of working with other supporters twelve years earlier: 'I am not interested in meeting fucking Mackems [*Sunderland* fans] or Mancs [*Manchester United*], all I am interested in is Newcastle fans'. Rather, McKenna calls for a dismantling of longstanding programs of supporter rivalry by 'switching on' new connections between these groups. The following day in Liverpool city centre McKenna again used a meeting entitled 'Against Modern Football Debate' to call for unity (field notes, 10 May 2013):

> 'All of us can sit in the room and find reasons why we can't be mates with one another and why we can't actually work together. We sat here last night, and Man United fans, Everton fans, Tranmere fans and Crewe fans sat here and said 'Yeah, it's about time we actually do something together' like in Germany. As Kev Rye from Supporters Direct said last night, the thing that unites all of us is much greater than what divides us in those ninety minutes'.

These meetings also reflected on the achievements of associated groups and associated nodes of this movement, such as the successes of German fan movements that have given supporters some control in the governance of clubs, the efforts of SOS (Millward, 2012), and the institutionalisation of groups such as *Supporters Direct,* which seeks to support fan ownership of sports clubs and was set up by a collective including Labour MP Andy Burnham (who acted as the group's first Chair). These reflections expressed that a reprogramming of football could take place if fans were able to act collectively for the first time. Next, therefore, we explore this trend towards supporter unity, and the role of *StandAMF* in mobilizing protests and deliberating outcomes. We also consider the roles played by other SMOs related to the rhizomatic network, such as the FSF.

Materialising Rhizomatic Movements

An outcome of successive social media discussions, and subsequent meetings was the first cross-club protest against ticket prices in English football. Held on 19 June 2013, the same day the Premier League and Football League announced its match fixtures for the 2013/14 season, the *StandAMF* march took place. *Liverpool's* SOS, *StandAMF* and the FSF combined to organise and promote the event. 400 supporters from diverse clubs - many of them arch rivals - marched together from London's Regent's Park to the Premier League and Football League's Headquarters at Gloucester Place. Fieldnotes from the day read as follows:

> *'The plan is to meet at the Boating Lake in Regent's Park at 1pm. From Twitter, however, I discover that everyone is meeting beforehand for a drink at The Globe, a pub well known to away fans, highly visible, and on the corner of Marylebone Road. At around 12:15pm, the walls outside The Globe are adorned with various banners from Liverpool and Arsenal as groups of fans mix and chat. [SOS Committee Member] Ste Martin and I move to*

Regent's Park … to get ready for everyone meeting at 1pm. As we move to the meeting point we pick up stragglers as well as recognisable members of the media … Lads with banners continue to line up, … fans of Liverpool, Spurs, Leicester City and Arsenal, but supporters from a range of clubs – Sunderland, Manchester City, Crewe Alexandra, Sheffield Wednesday, Manchester United (who have travelled on the Liverpool coach!), Crystal Palace, Everton, Dulwich Hamlet, as well as representatives of StandAMF and the FSF are in attendance…. Young Spurs fans provide disparaging songs about Sky Sports as their film crew appear, and a number of beach balls are being knocked about through the burgeoning crowd. By 1:45pm I count 300 people … The protest snakes through the tight paths and quaint bridges of Regent's Park and onto Baker Street. Smokebombs are set off, and pockets of people start chants. It is difficult to keep the protest and chanting together as the crowd elongates because the protest must remain on the paths – a point made clear to us numerous times by police officers who have been present throughout the day. When we hit Baker Street though, people sprawl out onto the road, and the protest gains a new density. At this point, chants generally led by Ste Martin, who, with a megaphone and a hi-vis jacket (adorned with 'Don't Buy the Sun' on the back), orchestrates the protest. As a result, the chants become louder, more sustained and coordinated… The group leading the march with the 'Football Without Fans is Nothing' banner stop, bringing the protest together, providing an opportunity for the national media to take photos. The march stops where the Premier League and Football League are housed, 30 Gloucester Place. The aim is to occupy the spaces outside the offices and for select members of the protest to be invited in and talk to Richard Scudamore and other officials. The protest, at the point where we reach 30 Gloucester Place, is meant to move into a pen across the road, but does not … the two policemen are now on their radios, calling for support. They urgently ask those individuals in hi-vis jackets to lead and get everyone into the pen, a demand met with shrugged shoulders and responses such as, "we don't have the power to control what other people do and we're not leading this".'

Insert Figure 1 Here.

Organized across online social media discussions and urban events - these spaces of autonomy (Castells, 2012) - the rhizomatic collection of multiple, previously unconnected groups became more 'real' in the 'occupied' urban space of 30 Gloucester Place. Castells (2012) argues that occupying space has three key effects First, being physically together enhances collective emotional experiences: marching and chanting in unison produces affective 'glue' between individuals (cf. Walkerdine, 2010). Secondly, protests in symbolic urban spaces materialise discontent in ways that are difficult to ignore by established programmers. Figure 1, for example shows the defacement of the Premier League headquarters, a key node in the program of 'modern football'. Note the marks of multiple organizations in attendance, all of which share the 'Against Modern Football' slogan. Thirdly, these and other representations within the protest, such as banners and chants - feed back into established media networks (see Gibson, 2013), as well as online media through the use of '#AMF' tags. Moreover, as the fieldnotes illustrate, the occupation of space feeds back into online architectures. This helps to organize the protest in real-time, and provides a sense of connection for those unable to attend, as the protest transcends its original location through online space.

Moreover, it is through online space, as well as fanzines that fans began to debate the outcomes of the protest. *Tottenham Hotspur Supporters' Trust* member Martin Cloake saw progress, but called for continued action since expecting ticket prices to fall immediately is,

'as futile as waiting for 'the football bubble to burst' [...] What matters is that the discussion is happening, and that fans are organising around it [...]. The fact that a cross-club campaign is actively supported by a wide selection of fan groups and that the football

authorities felt the need to be seen to at least pretend to take it seriously indicates progress'

(*When Saturday Comes*, 2014: 16-17).

In terms of 'progress', the protest also drew political attention, subsequently informing separate campaigns that urge reform in football, led by MPs Hugh Robertson, Damian Collins and Clive Efford respectively. Moreover, the continent-wide pressure group, Football Supporters Europe (FSE) considered the protests to have "reclaimed the game" for English fans (FSE, 2013)[viii]. Perhaps most importantly, the Premier League recognised the legitimacy of the protest and offered £12 million over three years to improve away fans' experiences of attending games (BBC, 2013)[ix]. Nevertheless, many supporters remained unmoved.

At a North-West (England) FSF branch meeting in April 2014, for instance, attendees refused to attribute these achievements to the protests. One audience member suggested that the outcomes were "not enough" given the Premier League's broadcasting agreements have grown in value for three years, and the £12 million budget would afford meagre financial savings for each travelling fan over a season. Moreover, because vociferous supporter-generated atmospheres are produced by fans, partially generating the profitable 'spectacle' of Premier League matches, it was argued that £12m was too thin a slice of broadcast contracts worth £5.5bn for the 2013-2015 seasons (fieldnotes, 3 April 2014)[x]. Accordingly, a return to 30 Gloucester Place was proposed in 2014, this time led by the *FSF* and their '*Affordable Football For All!*' campaign.

Founded in 2002 to act as a 'singular voice for football fans', the *FSF* represents 180,000 individual members with a national council composed of elected officers and local divisional representatives. On 14 August 2014, 250 people marched again in London. However, there were notable differences between the 2013 and 2014 events. In addition to there being fewer protesters in attendance, *Liverpool* fan 'Andrew', explained, the protest was:

'lacklustre compared to last year, more organized and formal. The crowd felt completely different, too. Bear in mind it was organized differently. The energy and momentum that had built up had kind of disappeared. Not to lay the blame, but the FSF put a dampener on things as they took ownership of it. Rather than being a sort of dispersed and a bit more accessible where lots of supporters could, you know, join in and connect to it, this one felt a lot more hierarchical in that fans felt like they had to support the FSF and the way they want to do things […] By taking control of the protest and the movement, the FSF force individuals to take their approach and let them speak for you. To hark on about last year, sorry, but what was great about last year's efforts was that it was completely surprising that some fans from some clubs showed up […] And that was probably down to last year's *StandAMF* push, their events, publicity and the way they were able to bring people together without requiring these really formal ways of organizing […] That youthful, cross-club energy is now totally lacking'. (Interview, 28 September 2014)

Whilst the FSF played a role in the 2013 protest by facilitating discussions between Premier League executives and protestors, at that point the 'singular voice for fans' was but one node in a wider, distributed network marching under many different banners. Affirming that shared emotions help rhizomatic movements to overcome rivalries and enrol new members, protesters like Andrew express *feeling* more connected to the "dispersed" movement of 2013. Indeed, attempts to centralise the 2014 event lead him to suggest that the affective 'energy' component of the protest was missing, and that disparate groups were coerced into marching under the *FSF* banner, an approach that has historically been unsuccessful in generating widespread support amongst football fans. With this outcome in mind, we consider the implications of our data with respect to Castells' contributions to understanding communication and mobilization in social movements, as well as criticisms of his theories.

Conclusion: A New Species of Social Movement?

Castells (1977: 93) defines social movements as organizations that carry logics and goals that contradict institutionally dominant logics. Castells (2012) argues that, in large part due to the communicative potential of digital media, many contemporary social movements have become 'rhizomatic' in quality. Decentralized, spanning both online and urban locations, and apparently leaderless, rhizomatic movements affectively unite multiple social groupings in manners that transcend traditional communication programs, ideological borders, and geographical locations. For Castells, these features enhance protesters' power to enroll members to challenge dominant logics.

StandAMF illustrates these principles: Internet platforms afford *horizontal networks* that bypass old rivalries sustained by traditional media communications and clubs (King, 2002[1998]). Instead diverse cultural flows are 'switched' together. Longstanding European protest scenes; fashion and music cultures; previously isolated football club protest groups are all linked to produce fluid *spaces of autonomy* across online and urban locations. Here, fans shift their focus from what once divided them, towards shared topics of interest, and shared anger at issues of mutual concern. The result of this is to overcome differences "constructed in people's minds through communication processes" (Castells, 2013[2009]: xix), revealing new programs based in hopes to resist corporate logics.

A unifying force within these continually networking coalitions is a refusal to settle on singular ideological claims or targets. Without firm identities, hierarchical leadership and formalized goals, multiple groups feel more able to connect to *StandAMF*, and emerging events can be incorporated. In this way, rhizomatic movements challenge the necessity of collective ideological protest identities conventionally seen as generating effective social movements (e.g. Melucci, 1996; Della Porta and Diani, 2009[1999]). Rather, in the wake of widening social media uptake, collective action appears to stem from unity established

through open flows of information and shared affective responses. Together, these features partially validate Castells' claim for a "new species of social movement" (2012: 15), and justify digital-sociological conceptions of the folding together of online and urban realities (Jurgenson, 2012).

Despite the usefulness of Castells' concepts in understanding the emergence and effectiveness of rhizomatic movements, however, we stress that his macro-level focus fails to consider micro-political 'work' required to break long-standing conflicts, and to maintain the fragile coalitions that result. With this 'work' in mind, the notion that these movements remain leaderless is problematic. Pace Castells (2012), we observe that within the rhizomatic movement, there remain key nodes at which 'soft leaders' (Gerbaudo, 2012) emerge as 'switchers'. Though they do not speak for football fans as a whole, and their roles are not formalized, it remains the case that fanzine editors and Internet forum administrators are vital facilitators of discussion and collective emotions in online space. Moreover, the case of the 2013 protest illustrates how various soft-leaders arranged meeting points, organized transport, and orchestrated affective unity to extend and express the network during urban protests.

This criticism does not invalidate Castells' (2012) claims that that much of the efficacy of rhizomatic movements stems from the difficulty of policing or co-opting a decentralised movement, or that movements with no centre can 'self-heal' and respond spontaneously to management and co-optation. Rather, we observe that it is enough for the rhizomatic movement to *appear* to be leaderless. Where police sought to engage apparent leaders of the 2013 protest for crowd-management purposes, those individuals that we characterize as soft leaders maintained that their control was limited: "we don't have the power to control what other people do and we're not leading this". We observe a powerful duplicity in this incident: with no central power structure, formal hierarchy, or central defining issue, soft leadership emerges or disperses depending on the quality of the situation.

This characteristic raises policy implications for public-order policing, which has previously relied on identifiable leadership to manage protestors' conduct (Gorringe and Rosie, 2013).

Tempering this possibility however, are further features of rhizomatic movements that Castells does not consider. Castells characterizes specific triggers as 'sparking' a "largely spontaneous" mobilization (2012: 223-224) of horizontal networks. We do not dispute that affective 'sparks' work to bring previously established networks together in ways that facilitate protest activity. However, in carefully tracing the cultural flows that intersect within *StandAMF*, and the ongoing micro-political work in maintaining unity amongst divergent groups, we find that Castells' emphasis on flux and spontaneity overlooks the way in which rhizomatic movements relate to existing structures that govern social change. For instance, *StandAMF* in part feeds from, and coexists alongside more traditional institutions. The co-presence of older style SMOs, for instance, with their more formal leadership structures, manifestos and organizational methods demands more detailed consideration than Castells offers (see Couldry, 2015; Fuchs, 2012).

The place and role of the FSF illustrates this. In the 2013 protest, this organisation functioned as one node within the wider network that *StandAMF* helped to switch together. In the intervening period before the 2014 season however, this more traditional SMO emerges to assume a more formalised, hierarchical leadership role. Some protesters consider that this thwarts the work done by *StandAMF* in bypassing old programs of rivalry through horizontal, affectively motivated unity. This being the case it is necessary to recognise that despite Castells' claims for spontaneity and flat structures (2012: 224-225), divergent leadership and hierarchical organisational orders remain as latent potentials within these 'new species' movements. Furthermore, we suggest that as much as rhizomatic movements can self-heal they can also become precarious as incommensurate forms of communication and organisation re-emerge.

Reflecting on Castells' recent analysis of the role of emotions in the development of social movements, Mathers (2014: 1064) criticises him first for valuing the "expressive above the instrumental element of the movement". In light of the fact that fans deliberate the outcomes of the movement and evaluate success on specific goals such as pricing, the first criticism may be fair. With respect to this, our data illustrates that refined meanings and items of focus do emerge from the work of these fluid networks. As part of the deliberative interactions in online space, and as urban protest events filter back into media (e.g. Gibson, 2013), for example, we observe the crystallization of specific protest concerns, in particular the unaffordable price of tickets. Specific targets such as these are likely necessary if the movement is to interact with political parties that have entered discussions with *StandAMF* ahead of the 2015 General Election. Nevertheless, our data suggests that affect and goals are vitally interconnected: once the affective unity of the movement diminishes, the likelihood of instrumental outcomes may falter as protesters' distinctions re-emerge and the critical mass established through affective energy is lost, a feeling expressed after the 2014 protest.

Mathers (2014:1064) also criticises Castells for not recognizing that these movements exhibit a, "relative lack of success in delivering radical economic and social reforms". With respect to this criticism, it should be acknowledged that measuring direct outcomes of social movements is difficult (Giugni, 1998; Martin 2015). Nevertheless, emerging relationships with political parties, key political figures who support reform, and the Premier League itself, suggest an outcome of this rhizomatic protest movement is the acceptance of the legitimacy of fans grievances over 'modern football' (cf. Gamson, 1990). Furthermore, it is possible that rhizomatic mobilizations are becoming more common. Beyond protests against macro-political structures and institutions of late-capitalism to which Castells (2013[2009]; 2012) attends, we have illustrated that these network coalitions are also challenging market-logics in fields of leisure and lifestyle politics. In light of research that shows how football is a

context where power is programmed by state, media and corporate channels following a string of public order offences (Armstrong and Harris, 1991; Dunning et al., 1998), this possibility is important. In applying and extending Castells' claims concerning contemporary social movements, we affirm that sport is a site of everyday life at which meanings, demographics and practices of leisure culture have been programmed since the 1980s (King, 2002). Yet sport is also a site through which such programs are contested by way of intersecting social flows that stem from diverse social fields. Given the development of information technology, and unfolding anger directed at inequitable social systems, further accounts of the materialization of rhizomatic social movements are necessary as sociology pursues explanations of emerging forms of digital communication, micro-politics and societal change.

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[i] See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MEAIyH_gDSk

[ii] In 1992/93 season, the average Premiership attendance was 21,126 (Millward, 2011) and the annual rights that *BSkyB* paid the Premiership to broadcast matches was £38.3m, split between 22 clubs. By the 2011/12 season attendances had risen to 35,931 (ESPN, 2013) and rights to broadcast had grown to £1.006bn (paid by a combination of *BSkyB* and co-broadcasters, *BT Sport*). Broadcasted to 210 other countries, the Premier League brought in an additional £74.33m per season, split between 20 member clubs.

[iii] See http://www.newstatesman.com/cultural-capital/2012/12/against-modern-football

[iv] See http://www.umbro.com/en-gb/blog/behind-the-scenes-what-is-stand-against-modern-football-all-about/

[v] See http://blogs.independent.co.uk/2012/10/13/everything-that-is-wrong-with-football-in-a-magazine/

[vi] The Pro Lounge is another blog intended to afford cross-club discussions of "a wide range of footballing interests".

[vii] The Manifesto and White's preface can be found at: http://www.standamf.com/2013/07/23/time-for-a-manifesto-for-football/

[viii] FSE was established in 2008 and may provide a means of connecting *StandAMF* groups across the continent.

[ix] The manners in which the £200,000 was spent is available at: http://www.fsf.org.uk/latest-news/view/twentys-plenty-makes-its-mark-as-premier-league-launches-away-fans-fund

[x] The value of 2013-2016 Premier League broadcasting rights amounts to £5.5bn, compared to the £3.182182bn for the previous three seasons.

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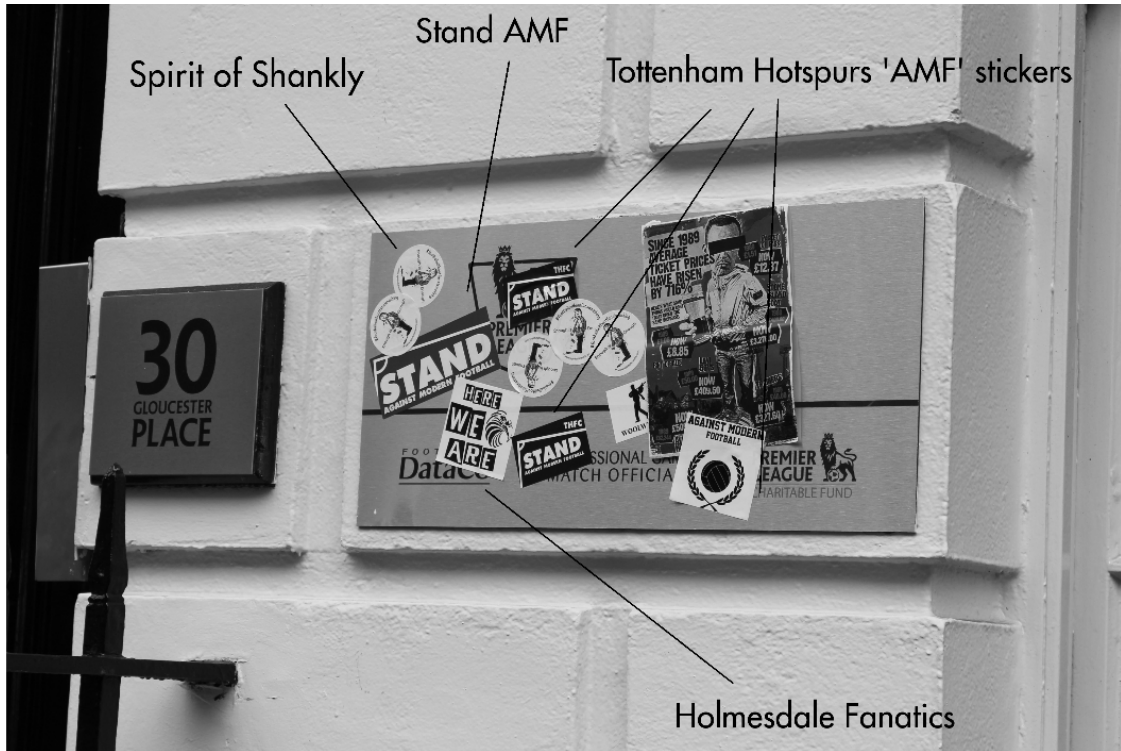
Figure 1: Premier League and Football League plaque outside 30 Gloucester Place
covered in stickers (photograph taken by Author A).