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Theorizing surveillance and social spacing *through* football: The fan-opticon and beyond

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Abstract

This article critically examines the temporal mobilizations of a 25-year football supporter social movement against the all-seating (stadia) legislation in England and Wales, to unpack, and advance, (neo-)Foucauldian panoptic theorizations of surveillance power and counter-power. Drawing upon prior empirically informed analysis of this movement; 'Safe Standing', the article interrogates new policy-based outcomes, including the early adoption of 'licensed (Safe) Standing' technology in 2022, to argue, that whilst publicly framed as a movement victory, it simultaneously serves to prefigure a new regulatory regime in football; one which extends the regulation and surveillance of fans within the wider social and corporate *lifeworld*. Introducing our new concept; the 'fan-opticon', the article discusses how Safe Standing continues to normalize a momentum of surveillance in sport and highlights the contradictory nature of security-related projects in the twenty-first century. We conclude that the governmentality of the state through football, to be characteristic of temporally sensitive hermeneutic struggles of power and resistance, through the discipline, and self-discipline of social actors. New forms of subjectivity are remoulded in ways which extend the power of surveillance and regulation, despite multiple counter-conduct, and discursive, resistance practices.

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KEYWORDS
fans, football, Foucault, panopticon, security, surveillance

1 | INTRODUCTION

Academic interest in the multidimensional nature of 'surveillance' has often focused upon the intersections between technology, policing (Lyon, 2001), civil liberties (Richards, 2013) and democracy (Bauman et al., 2014). Across this field is a concern with the ways in which the state's attempt to regulate populations, and their obedience, operate relationally, through surveillance, power, and social control (Bigo, 2006; Coleman, 2003; Foucault, 1977). The distinctive features of discipline and punishment draw heavily from Foucault's model of the panopticon, which has been re-devised, problematised and applied to a multitude of diverse social settings and securitized contexts, including, Latour's (2005) 'oligopitocon', Mathiesen's (1997) 'synopticon', and Bigo's (2006) 'ban-opticon'. However, theoretical developments have evolved in ways which consider both architectural mechanisms of power and infrastructural networked forms of control. Here, contemporary cases and contexts are seeking to stretch and problematise traditional conceptions of the disciplinary society, namely through the location of new places of surveillance, including, post-panoptical theories of surveillant assemblage and surveillance capitalism (Galic et al., 2017; Sheptycki, 2007). In doing so, they analyse problems associated with dataveillance, access control, social sorting, and heterogeneous peer-to-peer networked surveillance and resistance (Fuchs, 2011).

Despite the emergence of new digital forms of panopticons post-9/11, the physical and spatial aspects of architectural surveillance, and the reinforcement of the state's disciplinary power through specific discourses, institutions, and apparatuses, remain pertinent and must not be neglected. Indeed, such physical panoptic structures bring into analytical focus the tensions that may develop between the state and ordinary citizens and their bodies, through processes of resistance or 'misbehaviour', as directed through the creation of social movements. Hitherto, the relationship between architectural theories of surveillance and social movements have been underexplained (Jeffries, 2011). By addressing this gap directly in this article, we contend that the social world of association football and its supporter cultures provide fertile sites for mobilizations relating to surveillance inside, and outside, the sport (Turner, 2021). While football seems apolitical and banal, it is widely regarded as the national sport in Britain with a truly global reach (Millward, 2011). Indeed, through the physical act of attending matches inside football stadia as important social spaces, millions of ordinary citizens regularly engage in practices of fandom which shape their social identity.

In 2018, the UK Government's Sports Minister announced a new review into the legitimacy of the 28-year-old all-seating stadia policy in English football. Since 1994, all football matches inside the top two divisions in England and Wales have been played in all-seated stadia, following the Hillsborough stadium disaster in 1989, during an FA Cup semi-final between Liverpool and Nottingham Forest in Sheffield, UK. The match was abandoned after 5 min after a crush had occurred within two, over-crowded, standing-only central pens in the Leppings Lane terraced stand. The gross negligence of police and ambulances to fulfil their duty of care at Hillsborough led to the unlawful deaths of 94 Liverpool supporters. By 2022, the total loss of life stands at 97 after another 3 supporters suffered severe and irreversible injuries caused by the disaster over the past three decades (Conn & Vinter, 2021). Hillsborough thus remains the highest death toll in British sporting history (BBC News, 1989).

After the disaster, the free market demands for the new consumption of football became dominant. This was achieved, in part, through the development of all-seated stadiums as recommended by Lord Justice Taylor's report into the causes of the disaster, and represented a profound physical, and spatial transformation of a leisure ritual; 'standing on football terraces', which constituted the practice of watching football for most men, women, and children in Britain throughout the twentieth century. Traditional terraces, which embodied and preserved the social world of football spectatorship for over 100 years, were large, open, unrestricted, standing areas which generally occupied

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two-thirds of football stadia. These social spaces consisted of a series of steps with periodic safety-barriers erected at specific points to ensure excessive movement of supporters was controlled.

In his final report into Hillsborough, Lord Justice Taylor, who led the public inquiry commissioned by the UK government, stated: 'Whilst there is no panacea which will achieve total safety and cure all problems of behaviour and crowd control, I am satisfied that seating does more to achieve those objectives than any other single measure', and that over time, 'spectators would become accustomed and educated to sitting' (HM Government, 1990, pp. 12–14). However, the end of the terraces and the political and economic transformation of football produced new architectural mechanisms of power through the advancement of stadia CCTV, new policing and stewarding strategies, and supporter ID card schemes (Giulianotti, 2011). Consequently, Foucauldian surveillance interpretations of all-seated stadia as constituting architectural, technical, and technological features of the panopticon emerged (Bale, 1993; Giulianotti & Armstrong, 2002; King, 2010). However, over the past 25 years, a hermeneutic struggle has unfolded within English football between those spectators who wish to stand at matches (and persistently do so), and the 'risks' associated with this form of 'misbehaviour' in all-seated stadia. Amid this tension, fans have had to negotiate, and been disciplined by, an altogether more neoliberal and authoritarian regime (Turner, 2021). Thus, the contemporary social world of football in late modernity operates as a securitized domain wherein fans are commonly the subjects of security and surveillance-related policies (Spaaij, 2013).

However, the struggles of football supporters against social control in the realms of their everyday lives, discourses, and identities, are characterised by the building of a long-term social movement against the all-seating legislation; 'Safe Standing'. In seeking to break down the state's disciplinary power and its neoliberal marketization of its institutions in football, Safe Standing has achieved several recent policy-based 'victories', which together, constitute new regulatory reform in football. Indeed, from the 2018 review, the Sports Grounds Safety Authority (SGSA),[1] commissioned independent research into the safe management of the persistent standing of fans in all-seated areas (CFE, 2021). In January 2022, six clubs in England and Wales then took part in the first Safe Standing early adopter trial in the UK, which permitted a limited number of fans to stand in newly configured, 'licenced (safe) standing areas.' Consequently, the UK Government confirmed that any English Premier League (EPL) and Championship club wishing to introduce licensed (safe) standing will be permitted to do so, from the start of the 2022/23 season, subject to strict conditions being met, including: the enhanced use of CCTV, improved steward training, the introduction of a spectator 'code of conduct', and fans being strictly limited to 'one person, one space' (SGSA, 2021).

Social movement outcomes and 'success' is very difficult to gauge (Corry & Reiner, 2021) but the mobilizations against conventional all-seated stadia did not occur by chance. Furthermore, the state had, prior to very recently, been reluctant to undertake any review into a policy drafted in the wake of the worst stadium disaster in the UK and Europe over 30 years ago. The article's analysis of this critical juncture for the future of English football is thus sociologically significant for three reasons. First, by subscribing to the idea that sport and leisure are key sites for surveillance (Sefiha & Reichman, 2017), this article extends our temporal understanding of architectural mechanisms of power as embedded within leisure-related worlds. Second, by cross-pollinating ideas from social movement studies and (neo-)Foucauldian surveillance studies, we introduce our new concept, the 'fan-opticon', to theorize the ways in which fans are simultaneously the subjects of surveillance and agents of social change. This is especially timely following the reported rise in anti-social behaviour and arrests inside football stadia 'post-pandemic'.[2] Finally, we extend our critical understanding of how security-related and commercially orientated processes converge to enhance the sport's corporate and public appeal and are embedded in the regulation of new social spacing. Altogether, we argue these analytical insights reveal that, despite what appear to be social movement 'successes', the Safe Standing movement prefigures a new regulatory regime in football through the re-establishment of panoptic-designed social spacing. Consequently, new Safe Standing technology continues to regulate, individualise and constrain the social ritual of watching football through normative surveillance practices.

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2 | SURVEILLANCE, REGULATION AND TEMPORALITY: THE PANOPTICON, 'BAN-OPTICON' AND BEYOND

Since the late 1990s and particularly post-9/11, the critical sociological and criminological interest in 'surveillance' has grown substantially. The centrality of surveillance in global political debates and contemporary security governance (Jeffries, 2011) has meant that scholars have increasingly analysed surveillance-related trends in the context of risk management, policing, and implications on civil liberties and democracy (Bauman et al., 2014; Richards, 2013). Others examine the domain that this article predominantly slides into, namely, the ways in which the state employ techniques of surveillance and regulation on populations or social groups in order to maintain state power, enforce social control and ensure obedient citizens (Bigo, 2006; Coleman, 2003; Foucault, 1977).

Within what paradigmatically can be understood as a continually evolving 'surveillance society' (Lyon, 2001), Michel Foucault's (1977) seminal 'panopticon' thesis has for long represented a guiding analytical relation for critical analyses of disciplinary power. The panopticon, following Foucault, represented a mode of governance closely linked to the neoliberal state's expansion, whereby disciplinary modes of rule replaced earlier, more direct sovereign power. Foucault's analysis drew inspiration from Jeremy Bentham's all-seeing prison which was designed so that the guards located in a central watchtower constantly could observe the prisoners in their cells. The prison's architectural arrangements allowed the guards to 'exercise unlimited surveillance over inmates' (Gane, 2012, p. 615) whereas inmates were forced to *assume* that they were being watched, creating a set of self-disciplined individuals and what Foucault termed 'docile bodies' through hierarchical observation. This type of observation operates as a form of modern power, notably through the expression of specific types of architecture which operate to both transform individuals inside them, whilst constraining their conduct (Gutting, 2005).

Importantly, for Foucault (1994), 'power' should be analysed as circulating within a chain and understood as the way in which 'certain actions modify others' (Foucault, 1982, p. 788) and, as a 'mode of action upon the actions of others (1982: 790). Hence, the panopticon exemplified the disciplinary power of the state, which he argued had adopted a guard-like role by monitoring its citizens who, similarly, did not know exactly when they were being watched but became self-disciplined and modified their actions.

Notwithstanding, the state's disciplinary power is not solely acquired or reinforced through technological surveillance tools, but through discourses, institutions, and apparatuses, representing the 'mechanisms of control and surveillance' (Bigo, 2006, p. 34). Hence, these mentioned discursive and institutional mechanisms worked to maintain the state's dominant power over its citizens—whereas the panopticon subsequently becomes a 'way to understand how society functions at large' (ibid.). Such disciplinary techniques for Foucault (1977), become the basis for other spaces of social control. Here, the nature of discipline itself constitutes how we understand and experience the modern world as a 'carceral archipelago'.

Consequently, Foucault's panopticism and the distinctive features of discipline and punishment have, as mentioned, been problematised or applied to a multitude of diverse social and securitized settings (see Latour, 2005; Mathiesen, 1997). This also includes Bigo's (2006) extension, the 'ban-opticon'. Yet, Bigo's ban-opticon is not concerned specifically with football nor its fans; rather one securitized realm of society (immigration and EU security policies), and the surveillance of one social group (migrants) in a capitalist society. This remains important because, similarly, we draw inspiration from, and deploy some of Bigo's analytical relations upon proceeding, to understand the social world of football in late modernity.

Closely linked to the practices and politics of surveillance, the ban-opticon works not merely to ensure security professionals' identification, control and profiling of disciplined social groups, and the transnational *movement* of these individuals who become defined as 'threats' to society (MacDonald & Hunter, 2013). It also serves to *normalize* the exclusion (or ban) of the same targeted individuals or groups and distinguish between 'good' and 'bad' movements. In the reference to panopticism, these processes also transpire through discourses, institutions, architectural structures, laws and policies associated with the securitization of immigration (Bigo, 2006). Concurrently, Bigo's concept also departs from Foucault's panopticon insofar it is concerned with the normalization of the concentrated surveillance of a *minority* or *selected few*.

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Foucault's and Bigo's insights remain important here because they speak to the normalization of individuals' behaviour based on the analysis of public, private, and policing sources (MacDonald & Hunter, 2013). Subsequently, they inform our analysis of the contemporary social world of football and the surveillance of its fans, through our 'fan-opticon' concept. At this point, we turn towards the literature demonstrating the strong tendencies of surveillance in sporting and leisure cultures. Specifically, football fan cultures have not been exempted from developments in the fields of surveillance and security (Giulianotti & Armstrong, 2002; Lee Ludvigsen, 2022). Rather, football (fan) cultures compose a locus of surveillance practices, logics and technologies and a field where these surveillance mechanisms are contested by the accumulated critical knowledge of fan activists.

For Numerato (2018), these tensions constitute the multifaceted nature of the 'football activism complex' and encompass the mobilisations of heterogeneous supporter networks across a range of social movements both *through* football, and *in* football. The major themes of this activism complex, specifically, security issues and policing; socio-cultural and symbolic aspects of the lifeworld; the experience of 'modern football', the atmosphere and rituals of spectacle, and the governance of the professional and grassroots game, are triggering big mobilisations and new political opportunities. Moreover, the relationship between football cultures or stadia and panoptical theory has been discussed previously in the context of stadium CCTV, identification cards and policing strategies (Giulianotti, 2011). Importantly, we may also locate Foucauldian interpretations of the all-seater football stadium as architecturally, technically and technologically panoptic on a foundational level (Bale, 1993; Giulianotti & Armstrong, 2002; King, 2010).

Notwithstanding, where we extend these analyses and offer an original contribution, is by considering the overarching temporality in which the states disciplinary power, is reinforced in football, through specific discourses, institutions, and apparatuses which give the all-seating legislation its legitimacy. Drawing on prior empirically-informed analysis of the power and counter-power of the 25-year social movement against all-seating, 'Safe Standing' (Turner, 2021), we extend previous Foucauldian interpretations of football stadia, by considering the long-term legacy of all-seating on supporters' consumption of the game. This, we argue, enables us to offer an original conceptualisation of football stadia surveillance and regulation, by paying attention to the relational and temporal dynamics, which help us understand social movement outcomes and successes. In doing so, we incorporate under-researched and under-theorized social movement perspectives into the study of surveillance (Jeffries, 2011).

Indeed, the cross-pollination of these insights in a leisure context remains sociologically important because, through our temporal analysis of this social movement's discursive practices and recent all-seating policy developments, we consider how new, emerging discourses on spectator codes of conduct and surveillance, tell us something important about the how a fan-opticon is mobilised, negotiated and contested across time. This remains critical, insofar as the practice of standing, as what historically was, during the twentieth century, an unrestricted cultural practice on the football terraces, is an important part of the leisure life of thousands of people in British society (Turner, 2021). However, the transformations of sporting spaces are highly connected to the perpetual marketization—and pacification—of 'traditional' fan experience (Giulianotti, 2011; King, 1998), making it imperative to consider how commercial processes intertwine with the drive towards enhanced social control and regulation of fans' physical movements.

Collectively, this invites us to stretch and problematize previous panoptic theorizations of social spaces in order to understand how the fan-opticon is constituted. To operationalise this, we turn to historicise the football standing terraces and emergence of the disciplinary society in football.

3 | THE FOOTBALL TERRACES AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE DISCIPLINARY SOCIETY

The practice of standing on football terraces should, historically speaking, be considered a public ritual which has generated supporter solidarities and social networks integral to the wider experience of watching or promoting social change through football (Turner, 2021). This ritual is characteristic of what Hopcraft (1971) termed a 'privileged place

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of working-class communion'. Hopcraft drew attention to the collective, physical, emotional, aesthetic, and partly religious experience of the kineticism of working-class terrace culture (Brooks, 2019). Indeed, the leisure culture and consumption of the terraces helped preserve pre-modern *Gemeinshaft* emotional community bonds amongst supporters who only encountered *Gesellshaft* type social connections (Brown et al., 2006). Applying Simmel's notion of 'sociability' here, it can be argued that the terraces were, and indeed in some cases remain, one of the strongest forms of cultural life in society, through which recreational sociability has been practiced (Giulianotti, 2005). Here, terraces, as important social spaces, facilitate the expressive and liberating forms of human interaction. Football supporter communities are pushed into common association, through the often 'free-playing, interacting interdependence of individuals, which in turn, provides important sociability with a defining unity' (Simmel, 1949, p. 255).

Historically, the football terraced community became a regular structuring part of supporters' existence through the collective, passionate, display of movement and noise; a distinctive cultural identity, one in which demonstrated important social hierarchies. Standing, and moving together, supporters, and the social networks they formed, produced the atmosphere and spectacle which are built into the collective memories and social histories of generations of men, women, and children in British society. Through this ritual, these networked communities expressed their notion of themselves and of their culture through their consumption of the game (King, 1998). Tellingly, professional football stadiums, whilst historically occupied by large swathes of working-class communities and networks, have operated both as sites of social inclusion and exclusion for contrasting styles of support (Russell, 1997; Woolsey, 2021). Yet, the specific 'emotional', 'social', and 'aesthetic' expressions of standing on terraces were historically most felt by the working-class (Woolsey, 2021). And what bound standing supporters together, according to Wagg (2004), was the mythic sense of freedom to actively express the ritual in ways which were not overregulated, or over-constrained. Indeed, this common desire for freedom to 'bathe in the ethereal and hazy world' of the 'leisure-life' (Blackshaw, 2003; Woolsey, 2021), presents the discourse of leisure as an alternative to, what are the hallmarks, of the disciplinary society, through long-term civilizing processes (Elias, 1994). Consequently, standing terraces were, and in certain cases remain, fundamental to the maintenance of aesthetic atmosphere and pleasure, and facilitate important assimilation into the non-bourgeois supporter hermeneutic community.

Despite this ritual's historical significance, it was reconfigured during the mid-to-late twentieth century, informed by wider social transformations, reflecting the organic developments of British and European societies. By the 1980s, football in England was generally played in front of declining attendances in what were often unsafe, and unsanitary football grounds with little market value. After Hillsborough, the free market demands for the new consumption of football became dominant. This was achieved, in part, through the development of all-seated stadiums as recommended by Lord Justice Taylor's report into the causes of the disaster. Yet, for Bale (1993), Taylor's report coupled with social processes of modernization and the growth of capitalism meant that seating became *the* response to contested views concerning its ability to bring about comfort and safer stadiums. This led to Bale, borrowing from Foucault, suggesting that the all-seater stadia within a panoptic discourse not only became increasingly enclosed and segregated; but a model of disciplinary mechanism 'achieving power through individualization' (ibid.: 127). For Giulianotti (2005), the all-seating stadium, as a sporting panopticon of social regulation and spatial control, displayed disciplinary procedures of *partitioning* and *verticality* in two specific ways. First, rows of individual seats were installed to place football crowds into single units of social action and discipline. Second, seats became physical impediments to freer, carnivalesque, spectator behaviour. Initially rolled out in the top two divisions in England and Wales by 1994, all-seating emerged across some parts of Europe several years later, most notably in preparation for football mega-events hosted across Europe between 1998 and 2008 (King, 2010). Despite these transnational developments, some countries, notably Germany, did not introduce a ban on standing terraces, and whilst there have been ground redevelopments post-2006 World Cup which further comply with UEFA all-seating legislation for European competitions, many Bundesliga stadia retain different models of standing terraced areas, which Bergmann (2007) argues provide an important social and integration function, within an ever more fractured society.

Despite the German case, the introduction of all-seated stadia represented a profound social transformation of football grounds across Europe and became one of the critical hallmarks of the disciplinary society through sport.

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Whilst there have been some benefits, most notably in England, where those traditional terraces were offering supporters poor facilities; namely, the motivation of new entrepreneurial club directors to diversify the consumption of football through the concept of football supporter as 'consumer', which in turn, helped attract more women and families to games, this transformation also encouraged a more restrained form of leisure consumption, and Foucauldian method of social control. Indeed, as King argues (2010), the contemporary 'individual' plastic seating space operates as a disciplinary mechanism in the way, unlike the terraces, it works to isolate and obstruct the close, physical interaction between fans, and subject them to highly effective surveillance, or what Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) conceptualized as an increasingly 'individualized society'. Moreover, the transformation of this ritual is characteristic of wider social changes across the neoliberal *timescape* of English and European football post-1990 (Turner, 2021). And importantly, many supporters are now endorsing the social controls which have been introduced within, and around, English football stadiums through the maintenance of a 'family-environment' hegemony (Crawford, 2004).

The interference of, and surveillance by, the state and economy in the cultural areas of football spectatorship, operates to colonize the *lifeworld* in late capitalism (Habermas, 1987); whereby, ordinary citizens witness aspects of life that used to be within their control, such as community, solidarity, and existing ways of cultural life, taken away by process of bureaucratization, regulation, and commercialization (Edwards, 2014). As Pearson (2012) argued, the removal of the terrace as a community leisure space, alongside the increased regulation within, and around, football stadia, reduced the capacity for younger supporters, often drawn from predominantly local working-class communities, to experience the more carnivalesque appeal of matches in traditional ways. Such traditionalist narratives operate as important 'stocks of knowledge' (Schutz, 1970); a common set of cultural recipes, which are handed down by previous generations of football supporters (Woolsey, 2021). Significantly, these leisure spaces generate debate about their appearance, their underlying meanings, and their aesthetic sensations, and were standing and singing; the mainstays of the traditional ritual of watching football, experience the colonization of the *lifeworld*, 'altercations often arise when supporters choose to ignore such directives which threaten to curtail their performance' (ibid.: 138). Characteristically, such directives include the demand which some football stewards and police make for 'misbehaving' supporters to sit down and, in some cases, these acts of non-compliance result in ejection from the stadium. For Woolsey (2021), this desire of supporters to organize football's 'social space' along aesthetic lines, often clashes with the moral imperative to protect the rights of all those within the wider football supporter community post-Hillsborough.

Tellingly then, acts of non-compliance and resistance can emerge, such as the 'persistent standing' in all-seated stadia. This became one of the most significant issues which contemporary football supporter movements across both England and Europe collectively coalesce around (Turner, 2021). Resistance for Foucault (1982) often arises locally when bodies refuse to be subjected to specific forms of discipline and punishment. The all-seating legislation seeking to pacify spectator conduct is characteristic of such counter-power. Here, the bodies of those persistently standing are consciously producing their own patterns of conduct that transgress behavioral codes established through all-seating discourses and hegemony (Giulianotti, 2005). This is sociologically important, because whilst continuing to expand football's wider public appeal as a modern, inclusive form of leisure, it evidences that Lord Taylor was in many respects wrong, when claiming all spectators would, over time, 'become accustomed and educated to sitting' (HM Government, 1990, p. 28), or in Foucauldian terms, 'docile bodies.'

4 | UNPACKING THE PREFIGURATIVE POLITICS OF LICENSED (SAFE) STANDING AND SURVEILLANCE

During the mid-to-late-1980s, three relational supporter-based social movements emerged in English football, which together, shared an ideological commitment to a post-Thatcherite social democracy, concerned with what constituted the appropriate consumption of the game. Whilst having their own dynamics, these movements; the forming of the national Football Supporters Association (FSA), the production of print Football Fanzines, and the development

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of Independent Supporters Associations (ISAs) at individual clubs, addressed themselves to overlapping socially democratic policies, interests, and participants, and together, actively opposed many of the conjunctural arguments for the reform and regulation of supporters. After the Hillsborough disaster, the imposition of all-seating as an attendance model, led to processes of mobilization and association of supporters in the new arenas, a reaction to such policies, and to the interruption of traditional ways of supporting clubs. Despite this, an initial period of uncertainty and disorientation around standing and calls for all-seating emerged during a critical juncture for the future political economy of football in England, notably through the entry of BSkyB in 1991, and the subsequent formation of the EPL in 1992 (Turner, 2021).

In 1992, the FSA developed a '*Stand up for your right to stand up*' campaign which argued for the preservation and modernization of traditional football terraces. Whilst government investment was needed to improve the provision of standing accommodation with safer entrances, stairways and gangways, the government's regulatory body on safety at sports grounds; the *Football Licensing Authority* (now: SGSA) should according to the FSA, not be given powers to enforce the construction of all-seating without an agreed minimum percentage of terracing at every ground across all levels of the football pyramid. Here, the FSA, whilst acknowledging wider social context of English football's modernization, were re-stating the importance of preserving football matches as open, public, unrestricted leisure spaces:

> To most, going to a game is a social event. They meet friends, stand in groups together. Not so, in the seats—this typical arrangement cannot transfer to all-seater. The social aspect of going along would cease to exist very soon. Sometimes supporters sit, sometimes they stand, but most stand most of the time and this pleasure is something to which ordinary men and women should continue to be entitled.
>
> (FSA, 1992)

Despite this, no nationally coordinated movement against all-seating emerged until 1998, four years after the formal introduction of all-seating areas in the EPL and Championship. The FSA had been successful in networking a critical mass of highly resourced actors who were able to communicate effectively across the various regions in English football, and together, these networks were successfully switched across club-based rivalries, to produce a *Coalition of Football Supporters* characterized by core actors who shared similar political tastes, and prior histories of trade union activism outside of football. Together, these supporters were able to mobilize support for club-based protests which involved creating important identity frames, including, '*Stand up for football*', '*Stand up like we used to*', and '*Bring back terracing*'. These campaigns were agitated by a sense that the all-seating legislation had become a mechanism to enhance the crowd management and surveillance of fans, through specific policing and stewarding tactics towards those supporters refusing to comply, which in some cases, included ejection from the stadium (Turner, 2021). Consequently, a series of 'standing' protests emerged, seeking to connect a burgeoning moral shock and social unrest against the perceived draconian actions of clubs and regulatory bodies, with new political opportunities and spaces in which technological alternatives could be mobilized.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, leading activists within the *Coalition of Football Supporters* helped consolidate new transnational networks and relations across different fan projects in Germany, Holland, Italy and Switzerland to build an international network, *Football Supporters International* (now *Football Supporters Europe*). Together these networks mobilized a movement for Safe Standing (Rail Seating) technology which had become an innovative strategy adopted by some German clubs in the Bundesliga, to operate as convertible seating/standing areas across different legislative requirements in domestic and European competitions.[3] The reconfiguring of Rail Seating as new 'Safe Standing' technology became an important tactic for the FSA in England to mobilize national support for alternative, technical, solutions to conventional all-seating in the EPL and Championship. In doing so, Safe Standing emerged as a formal, professionalized movement which sought to break down the disciplinary power of the state by operating within the parameters of its own legislation through innovation. Indeed, one important outcome here, has been that by reprogramming the logics of standing in this way, activists abandoned the 'T' (terracing) word in favor of technology which both makes social change visible within the governmentality of English football, and ensures

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the 'persistent standing' of (misbehaving) fans are managed, and regulated, in a 'safer', more secure way. Moreover, the move to name the campaign 'Safe' Standing evidences how activists are often embedded within dominant social discourses and often employ categories and ideas that they provide (Steinberg, 1999). Here, we see how Safe Standing and Hillsborough remain inextricably linked both culturally and politically through the legacy of those historical views of football fans as somehow deviant. It is through this lens that the power and counter-power of the legislation become analytically illuminated. Tellingly, supporters' hermeneutic struggle over the all-seating legislation is revealed to be less about the socio-cultural and symbolic aspects of football, notably, stadium atmosphere, and supporters' human democratic rights, and instead, focused upon widening the safety, security, and surveillance measures of those fans resisting regulation in the form of all-seating as a contemporary surveillance practice (Turner, 2021).

Situating this social movement and its discursive tactics and frames within the wider, long-term governmentality of English football and the normalization of surveillance through the fan-opticon, it becomes clear that the ends or 'successes' of Safe Standing are fundamentally shaped by the means that it employs, and thus Rail Seating, or 'barrier seating', embodies or 'prefigures' the type of English football culture which activists seek to bring about. Namely, one which advocates a more sustainable form of governance, customer care and greater supporter (stakeholder) choice, through the disciplining of those everyday acts of supporters failing to comply with all-seating and remaining docile, notably, the ritual of persistent standing, and the specific cultural discourses, norms and identities it comes to embody. Indeed, both the focus of the recent UK government review and the SGSA's findings on the 'early adopters' of 'licensed (safe) standing' (Rail Seating areas) are characterized by technical arguments seeking to make the management of standing, both architecturally and in terms of supporter behavior, safer. Consequently, Safe Standing as a social movement characterizing the power, and counter-power, of the fan-opticon across multiple temporal periods, is sociologically important because it continues to reinforce the long-term impact and legacy of Hillsborough on supporters' modern cultural consumption of the game and the bio-power of all-seating, through both the segmentation and panopticized confinement of licensed (safe) standing areas, and the regulation of individual bodies within them. The normalization of disciplinary mechanisms in football stadia which have historically produced supporters' docile bodies, hierarchical judgement, and spatial organization, have been contested, but such contestation reinforces normative judgements on standing, through the building of an ethical definition, or what Foucault (1977) termed 'dividing practices.' Here, the all-seating panopticon is re-constituted through spatial organization seeking to control, and limit, the carnivalesque nature characterizing standing culture, and the capacity for it to transgress the norms of accepted behavior within the modern consumption of football.

Looking into the future, whilst the new policy-based outcomes outline a number of positive impacts of installing licensed safe standing areas, such as the 'easier spotting of overcrowding', 'stability for fans moving up and down aisles and gangways', 'reducing the need for stewards to manage persistent standing', and 'reducing the risk of conflict between 'misbehaving [standing] fans and those responsible for crowd management and safety' (CFE, 2021), it is noticeable that little attention is paid to *why* standing matters culturally to fans, and the specific social, cultural, and community benefits it enriches. Furthermore, the immediate 'victory' of legitimizing standing in English football after 28 years, simultaneously operates to normalize the fan-opticon through the dichotomy of what we term legitimate (good) and illegitimate (bad) fan behaviours.

5 | NORMALIZATION AND CONTESTATION OF SURVEILLANCE: CONCEPTUALIZING THE FAN-OPTICON

As apparent, the mechanisms regulating football fans do not solely depend on the use or installation of 'hardware' technologies of surveillance, but involve risk-focused discourses and pre-emptive messages, architectural elements and policies that, as akin to Bigo's (2006) ban-opticon, serve to establish a distinction between 'desired' and 'undesired' individuals, movements or behaviours. Collectively, these mechanisms again, as aided by their historical relation to, and presence in, football stadia, preserve the normalization of clubs and authorities' surveillance of fans.

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Indeed, in the case of licensed (Safe) Standing, it may be argued that this particular type of standing becomes a regulatory mechanism that is oriented towards the construction of sharpened distinctions between what we may call 'good' and 'bad' fan behaviour. Whilst both 'good' and 'bad' behaviours here are marked by, and subjected to surveillance, the former is attributed to *licensed* areas that are pre-defined in terms of their fixedness, deemed to be 'safe' (on condition of a licence) and, crucially, equipped with CCTV systems offering 'full coverage' of the licensed standing areas, that must be in place (SGSA, 2022a). Taken together, it can be suggested that this enabled distinction –between 'good' and 'bad' behaviour– arrives with a set of wider implications.

First, questions can be asked about *whom* that possesses the power or authority to set out the necessary criteria and consequently define certain behaviours according to 'good' or 'bad' (or legitimate/illegitimate) practice. Then, how this in turn permits the discourse on standing to proceed and be framed according to notions of surveillance despite the contested effectiveness of CCTV technologies and their ability to re-conceptualize urban and private spaces (Coleman, 2003).

Importantly, while the modalities of surveillance and knowledge occasionally appear opposed, they are occasionally 'brought into synergy' (Barnard-Wills et al., 2012, p. 94) as exemplified by this case. For instance, the Government's Culture Secretary, stated that: '[t]hanks to a robust trial, thorough evidence and modern engineering, we are now ready to allow standing once again in our grounds' (SGSA, 2022b). What is central here, and in the earlier examples, is the framing of knowledge accumulated by trials and associated evidence and technical know-how. Arguably, this knowledge as co-constructed by the bureaucracies, professionals and stakeholders involved in the trials, contribute towards the labelling of licensed standing as 'safe'. But so, simultaneously, this knowledge *also* informs the noticeable push for greater regulation of the same social spacing.

Returning to Foucault (1977), what emerges here is that the momentum of greater surveillance, stewarding and code of conducts—that is bundled together through architectural mechanisms of power—is also justified by the acquired and distributed knowledge. Therefore, knowledge (or indeed, the 'evidence') serves to reinforce the supposedly 'neutral', idealized and consensual discourses surrounding licensed (Safe) Standing despite the aforementioned historically and socially contested nature of standing on British football terraces. Yet as Foucault maintained, knowledge—whilst portrayed or presented as objective—cannot be neutral as it is moulded temporally by power relations. This means that the dichotomies of 'good' and 'bad' behaviour also become subject to definition by the hegemons of the 'Safe Standing' discourse who are characterized by their specialized know-how and technical arguments.

Second, we argue that the dichotomy arising as a result of licensed (Safe) Standing's implementation marks an extension of other pre-existing dichotomies within football's security governance. Whilst scholars observe this in the definition of so-called 'risk' or 'non-risk' fans or fixtures based on pre-emptive anticipations of disorder (Spaaij, 2013), we can draw from Klauser's (2013) who uses the examples of accreditation, access control and spatial ordering at football mega-events to suggest that stadium security is an exercise in 'differentiation' and 'categorisation'. These segregation-oriented policies categorize people into specific target groups and risk categories, whereby:

> "bad" inflows are singled out and prevented from entering (hooligans, political activists, etc.), "good" inflows are induced, facilitated and accelerated (peaceful fans, trusted workers and official delegations). (p. 293)

Building on this, we argue that licensed (Safe) Standing surfaces as another important exemplar of how this binary logic advances and comes to encompass the cultural practice of standing at football games. Yet, whilst 'bad' behaviour is undesired, surveilled (e.g., in form of CCTV, stewarding, warnings about stadium bans or ejections) and therefore secured against, 'good' behaviour or standing—attributed to licensed (Safe) Standing in seated areas—is somewhat more induced and, as discussed, articulated as a victorious and progressive outcome for social movements, fans and authorities.

However, the emerging paradox is that this 'induced' standing *also* is subject to, and accompanied by, enhanced stewarding, spectator codes of conduct, CCTV and more concentrated isolation (King, 2010). In a way, this paradox

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presents one of the foundations which the fan-opticion is firmly anchored in because, in this setting, one may observe a similar logic to the banoptic notion of regulating a selected minority group (Bigo, 2006). Hence, the surveillance practices that closely follow the practice of standing—even when 'licensed'—is not conditional but constant and expanding. Crucially, this again implies that the individualised plastic seating space, or the 'panoptic isolation of the seat' (King, 1998), (which still is subject to strict but less targeted CCTV and stewarding regimes towards the *majority*) becomes positioned as the 'normative' way or 'natural order' of watching football.

By unpacking these questions, the socio-historical backdrop of, and the contours of the disciplinary practices and 'counter-conduct' associated with standing become more enhanced. Consequently, this is where we conceptually introduce the 'fan-opticon' as *dispositif* and driver behind the evolving securitization of football-related milieus. It can be defined as the relational mechanisms and discursive vectors that collectively discipline football *fans* and particularly a targeted minority that are considered to destabilize the 'natural order' within football stadia. These mechanisms encompass the social, spatial but also temporal elements that contribute towards, and contest, the normalized surveillant regime in the football world which regulate and constrain the ritual of watching football. Notwithstanding, the concept also captures and recognizes the networks of resistance and counter-power that co-exist alongside authorities, football's regulatory bodies and clubs' attempts to discipline fans. Here, this is illustrated by the Safe Standing movement, which has mobilized within the parameters of those mechanisms enacted to regulate fans' conduct.

Socio-spatially, the fan-opticon depends on technology, and also relies on inter-linked architectural structures, hegemonic discourses and technical arguments, and pre-emptive logics. Meanwhile, temporally it captures how football's surveillant regimes are produced, contested and (re-)negotiated over a significant temporal period and impacted by external developments in surveillance fields and 'internal' events in football. Over time, the fan-opticon's mechanisms prefigure the ultimate goal of a regime of surveillance that disciplines the users of the desired purified and commercially thriving stadium spaces. These processes remain socially significant because they redirect football fan culture on a pathway towards greater regulation, whilst further normalizing the cultures of surveillance (cf. Bigo, 2006) that co-exist in line with wider social changes, and historically have been generated within and from football stadiums. Therefore, while the surveillance of football stadia and cultures has maintained its *panoptic* traits, the fan-opticon's conceptual value derives from its capacity to capture the nuances and temporalities of surveillances' selective logics and the networked contestations existing within it.

6 | CONCLUSION

This article makes an original contribution by utilizing a case study to critically unpack, cross-pollinate and advance (neo-)Foucauldian panoptic theorizations (Bale, 1993; Bigo, 2006; Foucault, 1977, 1994) with perspectives from social movement studies (Corry & Reiner, 2021; Jeffries, 2011; Turner, 2021) as applied to the novel and high-profile case of licenced (Safe) Standing. In line with the fragmentation of surveillance practices in contemporary societies, numerous analyses have explored their relationship to state power and techniques for the regulation of populations (Bigo, 2006; Foucault, 1977). Much like other securitized and consumer-oriented contexts of modern life, including airports, shopping malls or city centres (Jeffries, 2011; Klauser, 2017), football-related spaces should be critically approached as portals for analyses of surveillance. In the case of English football, we have highlighted the ways in which the prefiguring of a new regulatory regime in football is laid bare through new policy-based outcomes on Safe Standing; one which constitutes *the* legacy of long-term regulation and surveillance of football fans across the corporate *lifeworld* of British society in late modernity. In doing so, we state our contribution in three specific ways.

First, we argue that licenced safe standing, whilst framed as a 'policy victory' for fans and a 'successful' social movement outcome, extends pre-existing surveillance practices in English football. Second, we advance a new concept, the 'fan-opticon' which, theoretically, borrows from Foucauldian work on discipline, power, and governmentality, and captures disciplinary power expressed by architectural and technological structures. However, embedded

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in the fan-opticon is also a selective logic whereby certain movements or behaviours are more subjected to surveillance than others (Bigo, 2006). The fan-opticon conceptualizes how surveillance—across multiple post-Hillsborough temporal periods—works to discipline fans' movement and their social spaces through discursive vectors, architectural design and technology which reinforce the long-term pre-and-post Hillsborough view of supporters as deviant. Finally, in relation to social movements in football, Safe Standing and the reprogramming of logics (from terracing to licensed rail seating or seats incorporating barriers), shows the temporality of surveillance and consumption practices to be interdependent. Indeed, this movement prefigures a type of late modern consumption of football which creates conflict across different historical and contemporary fan typologies. Moreover, as a consumption practice, it reinforces the long-term view of supporter behaviour as something that needed to be disciplined and controlled. Social movement victories are thus often paradoxical and come to embody or prefigure a type of environment which the movement sought to actively oppose.

This matters sociologically because it speaks to the long-term view of fans as deviant and thereby continues to reinforce Hillsborough as 'legitimately' colonizing the *lifeworld* of traditional supporter culture and the recognition of supporters as active citizens through which communities, solidarities, histories, relationships are built and maintained (Numerato, 2018; Turner, 2021). In many ways, the 'misbehaviour' of persistently standing in all-seated stadia gave supporters counter-power (even if it was unsafe); supporters' accepting licensed standing as a positive outcome relinquishes that power; it subjects them to more surveillance and self-discipline, and in terms of futurity, it redirects football fan culture down the path of even greater regulation unidentifiable in other sports. Hence, this article elucidates the proposition holding that sites of leisure are contested arenas for the rise of new modes aiming to enable social control and the discipline of social actors. In doing so, we lay down an important marker for future work investigating the standing/surveillance *nexus* in other national contexts or surveillance more generally in leisure or sport. More specifically, we contend that the fan-opticon's conceptual and analytical relations are portable and can be usefully applied to other sites of leisure in transnational contexts. These include, but are not limited to, urban festivals and carnivals and more tempo-spatially fixed mega-events where surveillance practices are enacted, contested, and (re-)negotiated, as well as other football leagues where the practice of standing remains contentious (see Bergmann, 2007) in the twenty-first century.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest to report.

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ENDNOTES

[1] The SGSA is the UK Government's advisor on safety at sports grounds and is responsible for issuing licenses to the 90 EPLand English Football League grounds to allow them to permit supporters to watch matches.

[2] See Home Office (2022).

[3] Rail Seating or 'seats incorporating barriers' refers to seats folded up against a barrier or rail which runs the length of every two rows, thus allowing fans to stand for German Bundesliga games where the all-seating legislation does not apply, whilst during UEFA competitions, the seat is unlocked and pushed down to comply with the all-seating legislation.

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