

## **Supporters, Followers, Fans, and Flaneurs : A Taxonomy of Spectator Identities in Football**

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# SUPPORTERS, FOLLOWERS, FANS, AND *FLANEURS*

## A Taxonomy of Spectator Identities in Football

Richard Giulianotti

*World football (or soccer) has undergone an intensive hypercommodification over the past decade or so. This article examines the impact of this process on forms of spectator identification with top professional football clubs. Drawing upon previous analyses by Taylor and Critcher (on football) and the theories of Bryan Turner (on body culture), the article advances four ideal types of spectator identity: supporters, followers, fans, and flâneurs. The broad trend in sports identification is away from the supporter model (with its hot, traditional identification with local clubs) and toward the more detached, cool, consumer-orientated identification of the flâneur.*

No one would deny that world football (or soccer, as it is sometimes known) has undergone a fundamental structural transformation. At the elite level, football's finances have grown exponentially, while there have been major changes in the cultural organization of the game as experienced by players, spectators, and media commentators. The United Kingdom (particularly England) has perhaps witnessed the most dramatic change in football's social and economic standing, because in the mid-1980s the English game was synonymous in the global public imagination with spectator violence and an entrenched infrastructural decline.

One area of substantial discussion over the past decade has concerned the impact of football's new political economy on its grassroots custodians, the football spectators. In the United Kingdom, there have been persistent criticisms of this boom on the basis that established (but relatively poorer) football spectators are being squeezed out of any stakeholder position within their clubs, most notably the biggest ones, in exchange for wealthier new spectators.<sup>1</sup> *The Guardian* newspaper described these disenfranchised spectators as "football's new refuseniks."<sup>2</sup> Football's burgeoning popularity, its increasingly serpentine ties with corporations and other business institutions, the reduction of stadium capacities to create high-priced seating, and the advent of pay-per-view television are four key ingredients identified in this process of commodification. A government-appointed football task force, with a mandate to identify and recommend on spectator interests, produced two rival, concluding reports and has had a negligible effect beyond

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promoting antiracist work within the game. Nevertheless, concern with the impact of this commodification remains strong in the public sphere, notably in the United Kingdom and also in Spain, Germany, Italy, and France.

In this brief article, I seek to examine the impact of football's commodification on spectator identities relative to their association with professional football clubs. The article is divided into two broad sections. First, I consider in some detail the major arguments advanced by UK sociologists Ian Taylor and Chas Critcher during the 1960s and 1970s to explain the growing commercialization of football at that time. Second, I set out a model of four ideal-type spectator identities that may be found in the contemporary football world. In doing so, I seek to redefine more precisely and sociologically four particular spectator identities, and these are supporters, followers, fans, and *flâneurs*.

The analysis mapped out here applies principally to professional football clubs, particularly those whose corporate structures are owned or controlled on market principles by individuals or institutions. These privately owned clubs are most apparent across Western Europe (with the partial but declining exception of some clubs in France, Germany, Scandinavia, Spain, and Portugal) and increasingly in Eastern Europe. Similar processes of commodification look set to affect other football societies and other sporting codes. In Latin America (as in Iberia), clubs have traditionally existed as private associations, under the ownership and political control of their many members (*socios*). However, there are signs, notably in Brazil, that future legislation will enable single investors or institutions to buy a controlling interest in football clubs. In North America, elite baseball, basketball, American football, and, to a lesser extent, ice hockey have all undergone extensive commodification and remarketing, resulting in different and new kinds of spectator relationships to clubs.<sup>3</sup> In Australia, there have been intensive attempts in recent years to construct national leagues for elite level clubs in Australian Rules Football (AFL), rugby league, and soccer (A-League). The AFL appears to have been most successful in constructing a popular, lucrative national profile for its sport and in the process generating new kinds of spectator identification, which have experienced resistance from more traditional supporters (Hess & Stewart, 1998). This apparent trend toward a homogenization of the corporate structures of professional sports suggests that the arguments presented here do not just pertain to football but, instead, have a cross-code and cross-cultural purchase.

The article develops critical sociological and normative arguments presented elsewhere on the nature of football's commodification (Giulianotti, 1999; Giulianotti & Gerrard, 2001a; Walsh & Giulianotti, 2001). Following earlier work, I take *commodification* to mean that process by which an object or social practice acquires an exchange value or market-centered meaning. Commodification is not a single process but an ongoing one, often involving the gradual entry of market logic to the various elements that constitute the object or social practice under consideration. As I argue below, the marked intensification of this process in recent years is of a

different order to that which was experienced up until the late 1980s, and so might now be described as a period of hypercommodification.

#### ENVISIONING THE FOOTBALL CONSUMER: TAYLOR, CRITCHER, AND OTHERS

The earlier work of sociologists Ian Taylor and Chas Critcher provides a crucial starting point for any analysis of football's commodification from the 1960s onward. Writing separately, they marshaled a set of Marxist arguments to explain the apparent problems besetting English football during the 1960s and 1970s (notably spectator hooliganism, but also declining attendance). Generally, it was submitted that football support was being commodified, most obviously through a pursuit of wealthier audiences to attend games, a process underpinned by the attempts of the game's controlling forces to reinvent its social relations. Ian Taylor (1971a, 1971b) identified a corporate-driven transformation of football that had been under way since the early 1960s. The old working-class supporters—with their subcultural “soccer consciousness” that centered on the local team, masculinity, active participation, and victory—were being squeezed out, to be replaced by the “genuine,” middle-class spectators and their presumed interest in family football, spectacle, skill, and performative efficiency (Taylor, 1971a, pp. 359, 364). Working-class fans during the 1930s might have seen themselves as members within a participant culture at football clubs, but after the war, club directors perceived a need to repackage their “product” to challenge other cultural sites of conspicuous consumption in the emerging “society of leisure” (Taylor, 1971b, pp. 145, 147–148).<sup>4</sup> Concomitant to this “bourgeoisification” of football culture were the processes of internationalization and professionalization, involving more fixtures with overseas teams and the growing socioeconomic and cultural gulfs between local supporters and celebrity players (Taylor, 1971a, pp. 356–357; 1971b, p. 149). Critcher (1979) developed Taylor's themes and drew on Raymond Williams (1961) to elucidate the changing cultural relationships of spectators to football clubs. Williams identified three kinds of historical relationships that individuals or social groups hold toward institutions: members, customers, and consumers. With Taylor, Critcher (1979, p. 170) stated that traditional fans viewed themselves as club “members,” an identity rooted in the unbreakable reciprocal relationship between fan and club, and which is structured through obligations and duties, with the supporter holding some “representative” status for the club. Taylor had described this arrangement as an informal “participatory democracy” within local clubs. The customer, however, has fewer fixed loyalties; club involvement is relatively more instrumental, being rooted in “the satisfaction of public wants.” If these wants are not secured, the customer will probably take his or her money and emotional investments elsewhere. Conversely, the consumer has no brand loyalty but is instead a sporting variant of economic man, an exemplar of rational choice. The consumer maximizes information about the plurality of market alternatives before calculating which product will bestow the

greatest personal benefits. Critcher was less explicit as to how the customer and consumer models might be applied to football spectators. One might speculate here that the customer will follow the local club so long as it meets some associative purposes and its players can "do the job" on the pitch; otherwise, match attendance and interest in the club becomes irregular. The consumer supporter is very likely to switch clubs or follow those that offer winning teams or which are more socially suited to advancing the spectator's social and economic mobility. Nevertheless, Critcher is critical of the market-driven approach of club directors and football officials in their attempts to replace traditional spectators with consumers.

Both Taylor and Critcher used their analyses of changing club-spectator relationships, which are rooted in the commodification of football, to explain the growing phenomenon of football hooliganism (rooted in class and generational forms of cultural alienation) from the early 1960s onward.<sup>5</sup> I have argued elsewhere that to explain football hooliganism in this way may be rather economically reductive and pay too little attention to the internal subcultural dynamics and empirical complexity of violent spectator groups (Giulianotti, 1999, pp. 40-42). In addition, in elucidating the identity of spectators, both Taylor and Critcher were cautious to qualify their validation of the traditional spectators' claim to a "membership" status. Such a self-perception among spectators could be "wrongly" or "illusorily" inferred (Critcher, 1979, p. 145; Taylor, 1971b, p. 145). One might speculate that working-class spectators who have lived through the deeply disempowering realities of the postwar British class system would consider themselves to have a real membership status or to operate within a participatory democracy that is really owned and controlled by a handful of local businessmen.

The focus of Taylor and Critcher is, understandably, on British (in truth, English) football culture and therefore has nothing to say on developments across the European and South American games. However, their arguments do find a long echo in Alt's (1983) critical historical analysis of North American sports. Alt argued that television has "dissolved" local team identification, such that North American sports viewers "shop around the franchise marketplace for that team which embodies the necessary winning traits" (p. 100). The old ritual sublimations that served to bind sports fans to their club and community have been replaced by the mass consumption of televised, market-driven sport. Shadowing Critcher's anticipation of consumer fans, Alt noted that those teams that hit a losing streak are also quick to lose the empathy of television viewers. We may forward empirical instances of cross-cultural exchange to reflect Alt's theoretical continuities with British football sociologists. Spectators living through English football's commodification during the 1960s and 1970s were confronted by some features of cultural Americanization, such as cheerleaders and pre-match entertainment associated with the razzamatazz and gimmicks of North American sports events.

## HYPERCOMMODIFICATION AND DISORGANIZED CAPITALISM: FOOTBALL'S POSTMODERN POLITICAL ECONOMY

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There is little doubt that Taylor and Critcher served to rearticulate many public observations and criticisms that have surrounded postwar developments in football. Sports journalists like Arthur Hopcraft, Hugh MacIlvanney, and Brian Glanville were writing in the late 1960s of the new business figures, celebrity players, and spectator identities that were asserting their influence over a financially driven game. Nevertheless, as I argue further below, Taylor and Critcher did adumbrate some important spectator categories, with constituent features, to assist a theorization of the game's commodification. Yet, football's contemporary commodification—its hypercommodification—does have some striking differences to the condition that these sociologists and journalists had described some 30 years earlier. Since the late 1980s, this hypercommodification has been driven by extraordinary and different volumes of capital that have entered the game from entirely new sources: satellite and pay-per-view television networks, Internet and telecommunications corporations, transnational sports equipment manufacturers, public relations companies, and the major stock markets through the sale of club equity. I have argued elsewhere that if the commodification of football up until that time can be classified as modern, then this ongoing transformation of the game's political economy may be termed a postmodern one (Giulianotti, 1999). Concomitantly, a new set of social and cultural relations have arisen in this period, notably featuring the greater migration of elite labor, a gradual proliferation of continental and global competitions, astronomical rises in elite player salaries, new media outlets for football (for example, satellite television, club television stations, the Internet, and in future, mobile telephones), and new forms of cultural encoding of football through these media.

These transformations have been symptomatic of the contemporary condition of "disorganized capitalism" identified by Lash and Urry (1987, 1994), that is postindustrial, postmodern, and post-Fordist in its structural and cultural forms, and highly reflexive in its social manifestations. Disorganized capitalism emerges after the epochal shifts that Taylor and Critcher chronicled. It is characterized by the genesis of intensified flows between individuals, social groups, objects, and institutions across an increasingly globalized terrain, rather than through a more organized chain of relations within national boundaries (cf. Lash & Urry, 1994, p. 10). Part of this transformation involves the increased social and sociological relevance of communication flows, not merely in the electronic media, but also in terms of the aestheticization of consumer culture and the semiotic expression of social identity within an information age (cf. Castells, 1996). The old institutions and organizations that had regulated economic and cultural relations throughout the 20th century entered what may be a terminal decline toward the new millennium (Lash, 1994, pp. 213-214). Within football, that trans-

formation may well be illustrated through the rising power and influence of transnational corporations (TNCs) and the political and economic decline of some national or continental associations. Among the rising TNCs, we might certainly list major media corporations and sports merchandise corporations, but increasingly top football clubs such as Manchester United, Real Madrid, and Juventus possess transnational characteristics in consumer profile, flexible labor recruitment practices, and the global diffusion of corporate symbolism. The most powerful of these “superclubs” have formed an organization called (with some statelike irony) the “G14.” Following warnings of an impending breakaway from established football structures, Union des Associations Européennes de Football (UEFA—European football’s governing body) agreed in 1999 to amend Europe’s top club tournament (the Champions League) to suit G14 demands for more lucrative fixtures. Reflecting the disorganized political structure within European football, continuing speculation has surrounded the future format of top club tournaments, as a range of institutional actors (old and new) jockey for positions that are most advantageous economically to their respective owners, shareholders, and officials. Finally here, as I have indicated, these transformations are all constituent of the broader, immensely complex process that is the contemporary globalization of football. I do not have the space to deal with these issues with any degree of adequacy. However, as a basic statement on the subject, I would follow the positions of Robertson (1992) and Scholte (2000, p. 239) in arguing that there is nothing inherently divisive within globality or “supraterritoriality” *per se*. The problem arises through the specific hegemony of neoliberal policies and ideologies in underwriting the structural textures of global disorganized capitalism and its differentially experienced, socially divisive, everyday consequences (cf. Walsh & Giulianotti, 2001).

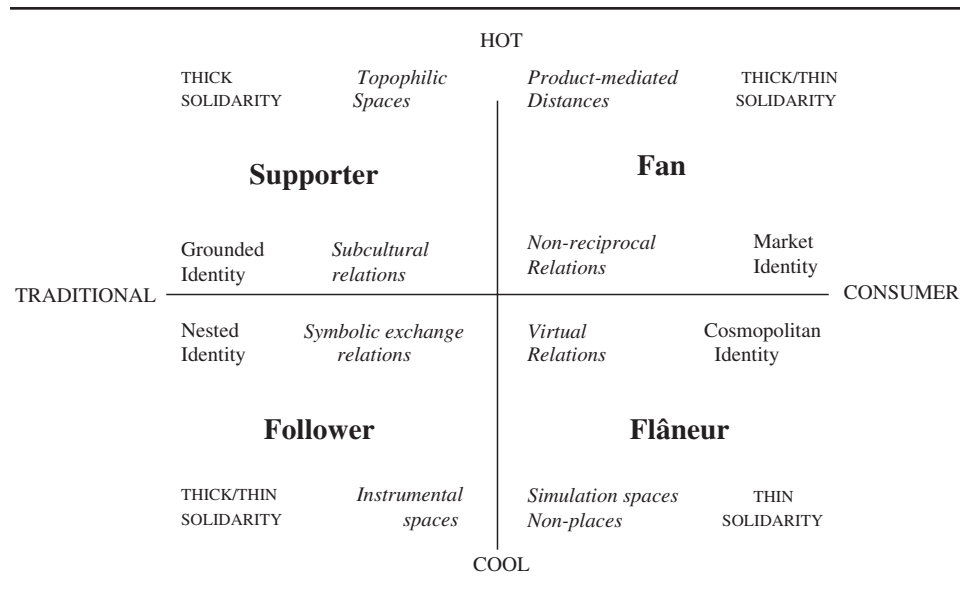
Critcher and Taylor advanced a modern sociological analysis that addressed football’s modern commodification during the 1960s and 1970s, and so they were unable to comment substantively on the consequences of more recent political economic trends within the game. In what follows, I concentrate on one critical social relationship that has undergone transformation throughout football’s modern and postmodern eras of hypercommodification. I refer to the identities of spectators and their relationships to football clubs.

#### CONTEMPORARY SPECTATOR IDENTITIES: THE PRINCIPLES BEHIND THE TAXONOMIES

I argue that there are four ideal-type categories, into which we may classify spectators. The main criterion for classifying spectators relates to the particular kind of identification that spectators have toward specific clubs.

As Figure 1 demonstrates, the four spectator categories are underpinned by two basic binary oppositions: hot-cool and traditional-consumer. Thus, there are four quadrants into which spectators may be classified:



**Figure 1**

traditional/hot, traditional/cool, consumer/hot, consumer/cool. The four quadrants represent ideal-type categories, through which we may map the historical changes and cultural differences experienced by specific spectator communities in their relationships with identified clubs.

The traditional/consumer horizontal axis measures the basis of the individual's investment in a specific club: Traditional spectators will have a longer, more local and popular cultural identification with the club, whereas consumer fans will have a more market-centered relationship to the club as reflected in the centrality of consuming club products. The traditional-consumer spectator opposition is clearly indebted to the initial spectator categories generated by Taylor and Critcher in the 1970s, and over the past decade at least, those terms have been central to the critical debates that have surrounded football within the broader public domain.

The hot-cool vertical axis reflects the different degrees to which the club is central to the individual's project of self-formation. Hot forms of loyalty emphasize intense kinds of identification and solidarity with the club; cool forms denote the reverse. The hot-cool opposition is indebted to at least two sources. First, theorists of the mass media, such as Marshall McLuhan (1964) and Jean Baudrillard (1990), have employed this opposition to explain the cool social relations that structure the communicative processes involving the electronic media. Second, the hot-cool distinction is also derived from an essay by Bryan Turner (1999) on the changing historical and cultural meanings of body marks.

Turner argued that in more traditional societies, body marks were relatively obligatory and employed to designate hot forms of loyalty to the



collective. Conversely, in postmodern societies, identification with the collective is voluntary and transient, reflecting cooler, postemotional forms of personal identity. Thus, tattoos in Western societies have traditionally demarcated the individual's hot and permanent masculine loyalty toward a specific social entity (such as the nation, family, female partner, military unit, football club, etc.). Latterly, postmodern tattoos have emerged that are impermanent, are unisex in bearer, are heavily aesthetic (often borrowed from Eastern cultures in design), and reflect a cool or nonexistent association with a specific social group. Turner also employed the binary distinction between thick and thin forms of solidarity. These latter categories tend to be congruent with his earlier binary, so that hot loyalties reflect "thick" forms of social solidarity, whereas cool identification produces "thin" forms of social solidarity.

When reapplied to the sports context, I will argue that Turner's model does assist in explaining forms of identification and participation among sports spectators. Ironically, however, it is worth noting that one weakness in Turner's analysis centers on those occasions in which he uses sports-related communities to illustrate his generalizations. His reading of sports-related communities (especially football crowds) is a little dated and reliant on commonsense knowledge that can be empirically refuted. He makes the unfortunate, rather stereotyped error of discussing the "local solidarity" of football clubs in connection with fascism and overt hostility to economic globalization.<sup>6</sup> More seriously, in reaching for generalizations on contemporary corporeal culture, Turner left us to piece together a rather confused portrait of bodily relations within specific cultural forms. In the case of football, he argued that clubs are "emotive communities," conforming to Maffesoli's "neo-tribal" category in constituting sites for "Dionysian affective and orgiastic experiences" (Turner, 1999, p. 48). Yet even these working-class clubs are still seen as subject to market colonization, being "quickly incorporated into financial interests" (Turner, 1999). Meanwhile, the authenticity of the supporters' local solidarity is punctured by Turner (1999, p. 46), in being described as "partly simulated forms of traditional communalism." In sum, this leaves us with a somewhat fragmentary, confusing reading of spectator identities: given to orgiastic pleasures, comprehensible in relation to fascistic tendencies, subject to commodification, and a simulation of prior forms of community.

In turn, by way of redeveloping Turner's model, it is important to return to the cultural form and to the social relations surrounding the game itself to map out the spectator identities. Each of the four spectator categories shows a distinctive synthesis of hot, cool, traditional, and consumer qualities. Each category displays distinctive kinds of identification with a specific club and a particular motivation for such a personal association. Each category evidences a particular form of spatial relationship to the club. As ideal types, these categories do allow for degrees of empirical variation and difference among their constituents, for example in their relative manifestations of thick or thin solidarity.

## TRADITIONAL/HOT SPECTATORS: SUPPORTERS

The traditional/hot spectator is defined here as a supporter of the football club. The classic supporter has a long-term personal and emotional investment in the club. This may be supplemented (but never supplanted) by a market-centered investment, such as buying shares in the club or expensive club merchandise, but the rationale for that outlay is still underpinned by a conscious commitment to show thick personal solidarity and offer monetary support toward the club. Showing support for the club in its multifarious forms (including market ones) is considered to be obligatory, because the individual has a relationship with the club that resembles those with close family and friends. In South America, supporters talk of their respective clubs as “mothers,” whereas they are its “sons” or “children.” More routinely, whereas the players at the club may change, the ground is always “home.” Renouncing support or switching allegiances to a rival club is impossible; traditional supporters are culturally contracted to their clubs.

Traditionally, the club is an emblem of its surrounding community, from whence it draws its core supporters. To establish themselves, clubs may have “raised the banner of town chauvinism, and prospered under it” (Hopcraft, 1968, p. 186), but the social and cultural impact of a club is always more relevant to local supporters than its unstable economic impact. Localist solidarity is strong, although some clubs with ethnic traditions might retain the deep affections of diasporic supporters. To continue the Durkheimian metaphor, the club might be seen as a totemic representation of the surrounding community. Thus, the various supporter rituals surrounding match day (not least the chanting of the club’s name and the oldest supporter songs) coalesce to become a ceremony, through which the supporters worship themselves. The body becomes a key vehicle for communicating these hot and permanent forms of solidarity with club/community: Club crests are tattooed onto arms and torsos; club colors are worn perennially; during matches, the supporter corpus comprises hands, arms, and bodies that move in unison as part of the various supporter chants.

Supporters habitually have a “topophilic”<sup>7</sup> relationship toward the club’s core spaces, primarily the home ground (Bale, 1994). Supporters attend regularly, coming to know the ground’s nooks and crannies in a very familiar, personal manner. The ground enhances their thick solidarity with fellow supporters, crowds of whom generate an atmosphere on match days that is considered to be special or unique. Supporting the club is a key preoccupation of the individual’s self, so that attending home fixtures is a routine that otherwise structures the supporter’s free time.<sup>8</sup> Supporting the club is a lived experience, rooted in a grounded identity that is reflected in an affectionate relationship to the ground that is regularly revisited. Moreover, the supporter’s emotional investment in the club is reciprocated in several ways. The club might be seen to repay that faith by winning some matches or even some trophies, but less instrumental elements of reciprocated affection are at least as crucial. The club’s players might play in a style that is favored by

the supporters and the club's traditions (whether this is flamboyant, fluent, tough, or efficient), perhaps even reflecting some distinctive local values. Outwith match day, supporters may enjoy some community benefits through use of club facilities or social engagements with officials and players.<sup>9</sup>

Supporters themselves husband these strong senses of hot, traditional identification in a subcultural manner. Following Taylor, we may state that the cultural history and identity surrounding the club, its community, and its supporters might be considered sufficiently specious for these to be considered as subcultural in the sociological sense, at least when contrasted with those traditions and identities holding sway in other football clubs and nations. New generations of supporters are socialized into the core subcultural values by their parent groups or by older peers. Key forums for the debating of local club questions and the reproduction of subcultural values emerged through the creation of specific supporter associations, or latterly through the production of "fanzines" that are sold on the streets outside the ground. Yet within the support, there are inevitably various status gradations. To borrow from Thornton's (1995, pp. 8-14) development of Bourdieu (1984), some supporters seek to display greater volumes of "subcultural capital" to authenticate their support to the extent of claiming greater status over their fellow supporters. In the United Kingdom, subcultural capital is really reserved for those supporters who continued to attend and to live through those periods when their clubs were unsuccessful rather than become part-time supporters; distinction is also acquired by those football spectators who did not emerge during the post-1990 boom in the sport's fashionability.<sup>10</sup> The embodiment of key values is also accorded status, such as dedication to the club or vocal appreciation of the aesthetics behind the team's playing style. Moreover, the supporters' commitment to the team's cause does not preclude a deep interest and understanding of the various qualities and subcultural values of other clubs and their players. Supporters are both custodians of football qua game and hot participants in active rivalries with other clubs, notably those from neighboring communities (Armstrong & Giulianotti, 2001). For traditional/hot supporters, one cannot acquire subcultural capital in a purely market manner simply by purchasing the latest club commodities.

### TRADITIONAL/COOL SPECTATORS: FOLLOWERS

The traditional/cool spectators are followers of clubs, but they are also followers of players, managers, and other football people. The follower is so defined not by an itinerant journey alongside the club but, instead, by keeping abreast of developments among clubs and football people in which he or she has a favorable interest. The follower has implicit awareness of, or an explicit preoccupation with, the particular senses of identity and community that relate to specific clubs, to specific nations, and to their associated supporter groups. But the follower arrives at such identification through a

vicarious form of communion, most obviously via the cool medium of the electronic media.

Traditional/cool followers may evince either thin or thick forms of solidarity toward their favored football institutions. In its thin solidarity form, the follower might be drawn to a particular club because of its historical links to his or her favored club, such as in one club hiring the other's players or manager. The distant club might have ideological attractions for specific individual followers, such as the anarcho-leftist St. Pauli club in Hamburg, the ethno-national culture of Barcelona, or the fascistic subcultures at clubs such as Lazio, Verona, Real Madrid, or some clubs from the former East Germany. In its thick form of solidarity, groups of followers might establish friendship relationships with the traditional hot supporters at these clubs. In Italy, for example, there are complex, subcultural lineages of friendship and strong rivalry that exist across club supporter groups, which might, for example, encourage Sampdoria supporters to be Parma followers.<sup>11</sup> In the United Kingdom, there are friendships that link club supporter groups through religious-ethnic sentiments.<sup>12</sup> Among some hooligan groups in particular, there are signs of informal transnational friendship networks, such as those between English firms and hooligans in the Benelux countries, or Scottish groups with ties to some English club hooligans and some ultras in southern Europe. (It is worth pointing out here that rarely, if ever, do these subcultural affinities between club supporters carry a commercial *raison d'être*. Italian ultras, for example, manufacture their own attire and, if surplus value comes to prevail in its exchange, the group's membership can be fatally undermined.) Informal communities are ritually cemented through the symbolic exchanges of football paraphernalia and the generous hosting of visiting friends. In its fullest sense, very thick senses of social solidarity might be reproduced through the club in a nationalist sense, enabling the "imagined community" to be socially realized—such as when Turkish clubs visit Germany and find that the local "guest workers" are in massive attendance, magically recreating their national identity whereas their actual identification with the specific club is typically a cool, instrumental one.

In both thick and thin versions of solidarity, we have a set of noneconomic, symbolic exchange relationships involving the follower and the favored club. The latter is accorded the interest or backing of the follower, but the favored club does offer something in return that accords with the follower's habitus or established football interests, such as in terms of employing a favored player or in the club's cultural politics. The follower may seek to authenticate in normative terms this association with the club by appealing beyond principles of mere football success to more abstract social and cultural values. Typically, these values harmonize with those associated with the follower's other, more established focus for support. Followers may define themselves against consumer values to authenticate their traditionalist motives, such as through a stylized denial of the role of team success or "fashionability" in inspiring their club allegiance (as one

finds among Scandinavian followers of such unlikely football teams as Cowdenbeath or Stenhousemuir in Scotland).

To borrow from Cohen (1978), the notion of a set of "nested identities" might help to explain how the self seeks to integrate these different objects of allegiance.<sup>13</sup> There may be no simply ranked pyramid set of affiliations that the follower has for organizing his or her allegiances. Instead, these affiliations may be composed in a rather complex manner, with no obvious way of determining which identification is favored when different favored entities rub up against one another (such as when a favored manager comes up against a favored team). Nested identities instead function to provide the follower with a range of favored clubs and football people in different circumstances, ensuring that the follower's football interest is sustained when his or her supported true team is no longer competing. The proliferation of televised football now means that, to sustain the traditional spectating habit of favoring a particular team, the viewer must become a follower of some clubs. But, the follower is suitably inured with the cultural politics of football to know that certain elements cannot combine to construct a viable nest: Only flâneurs (see below), for example, would declare a penchant for both Liverpool and Manchester United, or Fiorentina and Juventus.

Moreover, the follower lacks the spatial embedding of the supporter within the club and its surrounding communities. For followers, football places may be mere practical resources with few symbolic meanings: a stage upon which favored players and officials might pitch up to perform before moving on. In circumstances of thicker solidarity, the public geography surrounding the favored club may be respected by followers, but from a distance, typically with no deep personal knowledge or engagement within this particular lifeworld.

### THE HOT/CONSUMER SPECTATORS: FANS

The hot/consumer spectator is a modern fan of a football club or its specific players, particularly its celebrities. The fan develops a form of intimacy or love for the club or its specific players, but this kind of relationship is inordinately unidirectional in its affections. The fan is hot in terms of identification; the sense of intimacy is strong and is a key element of the individual's self. But, it is a relationship that is rather more distant than that enjoyed by supporters. Football's modern move into the market and its more recent hypercommodification have served to dislocate players and club officials from supporters, particularly in the higher professional divisions. The individual fan experiences the club, its traditions, its star players, and fellow supporters through a market-centered set of relationships. The fans' strength of identification with the club and its players is thus authenticated most readily through the consumption of related products. Such consumption might take the direct form of purchasing merchandise, buying shares, or contributing to fundraising initiatives. More significantly in future, more indirect forms of consumption come into play, particularly purchasing

football magazines and pay-per-view or other subscription rights to the club's televised fixtures. The consumer relationship to the club is thus at its strongest among the wealthiest of football clubs.

The hot/consumer spectator can incline toward relatively thicker or thinner versions of social solidarity. In its thicker manifestation, bordering on the supporter identity, the fans' consumption practices are orientated toward enhancing the collective consciousness, intensifying the rituals of support. If large groups of fans attend matches in club shirts or other trademarked colors, then this striking display of visual solidarity may energize the players during matches. Thinner forms of solidarity are evinced from a greater distance. In its more extreme manifestation, buying into club regalia or shares becomes one of the few means by which fans scattered across the world may continue to signify their deep allegiance to a local team.

The fan recognizes that in contemporary professional sport, the amoral free market dominates, consequently the club's survival and successes are dependent upon greater financial contributions from all kinds of backers relative to the wealth of other clubs. Purchasing shares in clubs may be investments in football's boom time, but fans are reluctant to sell in the interests of personal profit. The brand loyalty and inelastic demand of fans for club shares and merchandise are consciously intended to provide the club with financial stability, typically to enable the purchase of better players (Conn, 1997, p. 155). But in promoting the transformation of its spectators into rather consumer-centered fan identities, the club tends to generate a set of utilitarian conditions for its consumers to continue attending. If the club fails to deliver on its market promises (such as "brand improvement" of the team), then the fans may drift into other markets (other leisure activities, other football leagues, though probably not supporting rival teams) in the deculturalized pursuit of "value for money." If solidarity is rather thicker, then fans may collectivize and agitate to unseat the incumbent controllers, such as by sacking the board or forming independent shareholder associations. Most typically, the club's fans are politically passive, strong in their affections for club and players, probably geographically removed from the club's home, and especially separated from the entertainment "star system" in which the players circulate.

Consequently, football fans resemble the fans of leading musicians, actors, and media personalities, through their largely unidirectional relationship toward these household names. Thompson (1997) described this social framework in terms of "non-reciprocal relations of intimacy with distant others" (pp. 220-222). Fans refer to stars by first name, discuss their private lives and traits, collect biographical snippets, surround the family home or workplace with their images, and perhaps even fantasize about a loving, sexual relationship with their objects of affection. Star footballers, like other celebrities, are rarely in a position to reciprocate. Football matches before live audiences only afford a temporary break in the distance between stars and fans, but in any case, the divisions are symbolically retained. Football players at matches, or even when signing autographs or



visiting sick children in hospital, continue to play the star role. Their "work with the public" is a form of emotional labor, necessitating a form of professional "deep acting," which Hochschild (1983) has previously documented. Thompson viewed fan identity as a strategy of the self, a deliberate entry into a relationship that is fundamentally different from those founded on face-to-face interaction. Consequently, we may add that such a relationship is dependent on specific media that allow for a continuous and multifarious flow of star-related signs toward the fan. In the West particularly, this must mean capital-governed signifiers, through product endorsement, television interviews, and even forays into other realms of popular culture, such as pop music. Again, for such public relations, football players and club officials are trained to draw upon an ever-expanding reservoir of clichés and dead metaphors to confirm typified public constructions of their personality. These more shallow, mediated forms of acting help to preserve the highly profitable, parallel football universe that has been constructed to supply the fan market.

The commodity-centered mediation of football qua entertainment intensifies, so the fan identity comes under pressure to enter the realm of the flâneur, the unreconstructed cool consumer. This process is most apparent as market representations of football are increasingly telescoped onto playing stars and their celebrity lifestyles (rather than what they do on the field of play). The process first appeared in the United Kingdom with the public identity of George Best, but it has reached a new category of representation with Beckham, whereas in global terms, Ronaldo is the tragic exemplar.<sup>14</sup> As commodity logic comes to prevail, we encounter a redoubled fetishizing of the star's exchange value, beyond merely transfer worth and club wages, but into the highly unstable environment of general marketability, fashion, and exposure in popular media. Thus, football stars are quickly nudged out of the limelight by new performers and are liable to experience a decline in their "rating" among distant fans to a degree that far outstrips their continuing regard among supporters or those within the game. The hot identification that fans once attached to stars embarks upon a categorical decline, as fans generally learn to cool their affections, in expectation that the next player qua commodity sign will arrive sooner than ever.

### COOL/CONSUMER SPECTATORS: FLANEURS

The cool consumer spectator is a football flâneur. The flâneur acquires a postmodern spectator identity through a depersonalized set of market-dominated virtual relationships, particularly interactions with the cool media of television and the Internet.

The flâneur constitutes a distinctive urban social type first chronicled and characterized by Baudelaire in the mid-19th century, remolded sociologically by Simmel, expounded upon more critically by Walter Benjamin (1973, 1999) during the 1930s, and latterly the flâneur has been the subject of substantial debate among cultural theorists.<sup>15</sup> In its original sense, the



flâneur was a modern urban stroller: Male and bourgeois, typically in full adulthood, he would promenade through boulevards and markets. For the true flâneur, “kaleidoscopic images and fragments whose novelty, immediacy and vividness, coupled with their fleeting nature and often strange juxtaposition, provided a range of aesthetic sensations and experiences” (Featherstone, 1995, p. 150). Benjamin’s (1999) flâneur is understood in part as an idler and traveler, a student of physiognomy and character among the passing throng, essentially semidetached in his engagement with the crowds and commodities of the labyrinthine metropolis.

In its contemporary manifestation, I would suggest the flâneur is less gender specific. Class differences must remain, because the flâneur has the economic, cultural, and educational capital to inspire a cosmopolitan interest in the collection of experiences. In addition, compared to Baudelaire’s initial version, the contemporary flâneur is increasingly detached from the experiences that are collected, for at least three reasons: first, following Foucault, the rise of a self-regulating, panoptical self that gazes on objects and bodies (including one’s own); second, the rise of virtual forms of communication that increasingly replace face-to-face, intersubjective exchanges and experiences; third, the growing commodification of social relationships and objects, such that there are fewer forms of public interaction or elements of material culture that appear without a market-centered motive. Accordingly, the flâneur’s social practices are increasingly oriented toward consumption.

The football flâneur may tend to be more male than female, but not by definition. The flâneur is more likely to be bourgeois and thus in pursuit of a multiplicity of football experiences. The flâneur adopts a detached relationship to football clubs, even favored ones. A true football flâneur, the cool consumer belongs only to a virtual community of strollers who window-shop around clubs. In the most extreme manifestation, national allegiances may also be exchanged on the grounds of competitive successes or mediated identification with superstar celebrities. The adornment of a team’s attire is in tune with a couture aesthetic, drawn to the signifier (the shirt color, the shirt design, its crest, even its sponsor logo) rather than to what is signified conceptually (the specific, grounded identity of the club or the nation). The flâneur thereby avoids any personal consumption by the appended signs but instead consumes these signifiers in a disposable and cliché-like fashion, as if adopting a temporary tattoo. Moreover, the football flâneur’s natural habitat is increasingly the virtual arena, seeking the sensations of football as represented through television, Internet, or perhaps in the future, the audiovisual bodysuit. Thus, television presentation of football is tailored toward a flâneur-type experience. Television compresses time-space differences, distilling entire matches or tournaments into 100-second transmissions of blinding, aestheticized action, to an accompanying backbeat that drifts between techno and opera.

The cool/consumer seeks relatively thin forms of social solidarity with other fellow fans. Within the context of a postemotional panoply of social

relations, the flâneur is definitively low in genuine collective affect. Nevertheless, there are occasions when flâneurs congregate and thus come to simulate in a playful manner the football passion that they have witnessed in prior media representations of those who appear to be true supporters.<sup>16</sup> The cool consumer is a cosmopolitan, but not in the classical sense whereby constant perambulations produce a worldly merchant in ideas. Rather, this cosmopolitan has relatively little biographical or strategic interest in discerning an underlying meta-narrative from the medley of football signifiers around which the flâneur dances, save for the instrumental identification with an avant-garde, winning brand. Flâneurs evidence the “transferable loyalties of the postmodern passenger” (Turner, 1999, p. 48); accordingly, they are liable not only to switch a connection with teams or players, but also to forsake football for other forms of entertainment. And the true cosmopolis, the cultural setting, for the community of strollers is the non-place, such as the airport departure lounge or the most contemporary shopping mall (Augé, 1995). Such locations are devoid of tophophilic meaning, are emptied of any sense of home, but house instead the cool and ungrounded circulation of football’s commodity ephemera.

Some of the largest world clubs have provided the flâneur with an increasingly welcoming shop window in which to gaze, thereby creating a quasi-community of cosmopolitans. And thus, relatively more committed, regular forms of engagement with these clubs (so long as they continue to win or to be chic) encourages the germination of a proxy form of narcissistic self-identity for the cool consumers. Invariably, association with winning is particularly favored, but so too are cosmopolitan signifiers of conspicuous wealth, European sophistication (French, Italian), or an avant-garde setting (high-tech stadium). Clubs thus become appendages, selected for what they may say about the flâneur’s personality.

Flâneurs may seek to authenticate their cosmopolitan identity through direct and unfavorable representation of spectators that possess traditional or hot characteristics. Traditionalists are constructed as regressive figures from the past—chauvinists, romanticists, xenophobes—in sum, truculent locals who refuse to reconcile themselves to the ineluctable hegemony of neoliberal principles within football. Flâneurs might try to depict hot spectators as emotionally driven and thus intellectually incapable of appreciating the fineries of the game. Yet as we have noted, the real identity of the flâneur is rooted in persistent motion, classically in material terms but increasingly in virtual terms, through switching affiliations like television channels. Thus, the flâneur who endeavors to authenticate a stable football identity relative to other spectators is something of a contradiction in terms.

## MOTIVES, LANDSCAPES, AND THE PARADOXES OF CROSS-CATEGORY RELATIONSHIPS

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The four spectator categories examined above have been distinguished according to their different football identities and the distinctive,

underlying relationships that they have toward the game. I shall avoid treating the reader as a flâneur and providing a highlighted recapitulation of arguments, but it is useful to elucidate briefly these categorical differences by reference to two analytical heuristics—the specific motivations and the spatial relationships of these spectator identities.

In terms of motive, supporters give their support to clubs because they are obligated to do so. The club provides the supporter not simply with an element of personal identity but a complex and living representation of the supporter's public identity. Followers forward various allegiances to clubs because it helps to sustain and spread their personal senses of participation in football. This diffusion of allegiances is structurally facilitated by an increasingly complex, mediated networking of football information and images. Fans are motivated to produce nonreciprocal relationships with distant others, which are qualitatively different to face-to-face relationships and which promote a consumption-oriented identity to bridge symbolically the socio-spatial divide. Finally, flâneurs are motivated to seek sensation, excitement, and thus to switch their gaze across clubs, players, and nations. The greater commodification of football, and emphasis on association with success, structures the flâneur's peripatetic pursuit of winning or chic teams.

In terms of their relationship to the material environment, supporters have inextricable biographical and emotional ties to the club's ground, which is a key cultural emblem of the surrounding community. Similarly, followers are cognizant of the symbolic significance of the ground to the club, but their dependency on mediated representations of favored clubs reflects their circumscribed ties to this other community. Fans experience a distant socio-spatial relationship to favored clubs and their stars. Consumption of star-focused products might affirm and demonstrate fan loyalties, but the communicative divisions remain even in face-to-face interludes as stars consciously reaffirm their celebrity identity. Finally, the flâneur's preferred habitat is replete with audiovisual stimulation, such that high-tech electronic media are particularly favored. As a mobile cosmopolitan, the flâneur lives in a cosmopolis of consumption and thus has no capacity to secure personal alignment with a club qua locally defined institution. Instead, club signifiers are adorned in a cool, market-oriented style, such that the most congruous landscapes for these displays must be the character-free non-places of what Augé would prefer to term "supermodernity."

Evidently, this model of spectator identities displays significant continuities with the categories advanced by Taylor and Critcher, but major differences are also apparent. The supporter and consumer categories have been reworked. I have tried to provide a less politically empowered vision of the supporter but accept their principal claims regarding the historical, cultural, and existential bonds of supporter to club. In addition, although inevitably accepting their market-centered definition of the consumer spectator, I seek to advance a dichotomous model that recognizes differing degrees of club affection between the hot and cold consumer.

The model forwarded here suggests a different structural relationship between the various spectator categories. Fans and followers share some primary, paradoxical qualities in their basic constitution. As hot/consumers and traditional/cool spectators, their dichotomous identities border on oxymoron. Followers have a traditional position in regard to the game's culture, but that is tempered by a cool relationship toward the clubs followed. Fans possess a hot sense of loyalty to players and to clubs, but that is tempered by a market-centered approach toward surmounting symbolic distances. Consequently, this synthesis of apparently conflicting qualities ensures that followers and fans can display relatively thick and thin forms of social solidarity. Historically, we may also view these spectator categories as intermediary retreats, as part of a strategy of negotiation and accommodation, whereby gradually the traditional/hot properties of the supporter are dissolved into the cool/consumer practices of the *flâneur*, although this does point toward a deeper social paradox.

As presented here, supporters and *flâneurs* are literally in diametrical opposition to one another, but they do appear to be dependent on each other for different reasons. In an increasingly neoliberal financial environment, local supporters practicing *realpolitik* come to recognize that the club must attract the custom of cosmopolitan *flâneurs* to preserve its status and perhaps push on for more successes. But can the same be said of the wealthy cosmopolitan who flits over the locals? After all, the contemporary structures of football are geared toward global consumption. Football is dominated by transnational corporations, particularly the merchandise companies (Nike, Reebok, Adidas), the world's governing bodies (notably the Fédération Internationale de Football Association and UEFA), and the largest football clubs. Unquestionably, the football *flâneur* is the cultural consumer that these transnational corporations are committed to seduce; their overtures are motivated by the rather hazardous aim of securing the *flâneur's* attention and thus securing his or her conversion into a warmer (more regular) consumer. Such a fundamental transformation in football, as in other sports or other realms of popular culture, threatens a Pyrrhic victory for the neoliberal agenda. As the political philosopher Michael Walzer has argued in a broader context, "There is a sense in which the cosmopolitan is parasitic on people who are not cosmopolitans . . . you could not exist if there were not people who sat still and created the places that you visit and enjoy" (as cited in Carleheden and Gabriëls, 1997, p. 120).

Otherwise stated here, if supporters become *flâneurs*, then the spectacle that is created by the spectators themselves will be threatened. There will be no more curious displays of football tribalism past which to stroll or on which to gaze.<sup>17</sup>

## NOTES

1. See, for example, Conn (1997), Horton (1997), Fynn and Guest (1994), Giulianotti (1999), Lee (1998), Perryman (1997), Dempsey and Reilly (1998), and the more accommodative work by Szymanski and Kuypers (1999). At least two separate

- editions of the British Broadcasting Corporation's *Panorama* series have also assessed, with strong criticism, the affect of football's financial boom on its established grassroots spectators and players.
2. In highlighting the abandonment of match attendance by an architect and his wife, the relevant article pointed out that the poorest spectators were not alone in feeling financially and culturally marginalized from football (*The Guardian*, August, 22, 1999, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,3894685,00.html>).
  3. There is a reasonable range of literature in this area. On North American sports generally, see Alt (1983); on Canadian sports and North American ice hockey, see respectively Gruneau (1983) and Gruneau and Whitson (1994); on basketball, see Andrews (1995).
  4. Taylor (1971b) was presented originally in 1968. He pointed out that, in writing the paper, his greatest debt is to his parents for an "incomparable education" in the "subcultural values" of their local football team (Taylor, 1971b, p. 372n).
  5. Similarly, Hargreaves (1986, p. 136) argued that selling sport to consumers as entertainment, coupled with the breakdown of social ties between football players and the audience, can lead to greater expectations and tensions within the audience, which may result in violence.
  6. I have argued elsewhere against the rather lazy connection drawn by some commentators between working-class forms of football fandom and fascist political tendencies (Giulianotti, 1999). See also the work of Robson (2000).
  7. Topophilia involves an intense emotional attachment to a particular part of the material environment; otherwise stated, it is a love of place.
  8. As one football journalist explained, "It is difficult for those who care about their game and, more particularly, care about their team, to comprehend life without this obsession" (Allsop, 1997, p. 95).
  9. In South America, most clubs remain private member associations, so that their swimming pool, gym, and other recreation facilities are all available to members in return for a modest annual fee.
  10. By far the most successful text on UK football during the 1990s was Nick Hornby's *Fever Pitch*, which became a major bestseller, acquiring numerous awards before being turned into a stage play and film. Hornby's book is a kind of autobiography, in which the author claims that his football obsession has determined his life course. However, the "subcultural capital" of Hornby as genuine football man has been revalued; for example, some critics point disparagingly to his abandoning of Arsenal as a supporter during his time at university. More generally, some traditionalist supporters also refer critically to spectators who came into football during its 1990s boom as "post-Hornby fans."
  11. For example, in Italy during the early 1990s, Sampdoria's ultras were "friendly" with Verona, Inter, Atalanta, Cremonese, and Parma fan groups; they were strongly opposed to fans from the lineage linking Genoa, Torino, Bologna, and Pisa (cf. Roversi, 1992, p. 58).
  12. For example, there are the pro-Irish nationalist sentiments of some fans of Celtic and Manchester United, or the "Blues Brothers" network of Unionist fan groups (Chelsea, Glasgow Rangers, and Linfield of Northern Ireland).
  13. I am indebted to Bea Vidacs for the first application of this concept to football identity and to her provision of the reference to Cohen.
  14. For a discussion of how specific football players appear to fit into traditional (Stanley Matthews), modern (George Best), and postmodern (Paul Gascoigne) identity categories, see Giulianotti and Gerrard (2001b).
  15. See, for example, Tester (1994), Featherstone (1995), and Weinstein and Weinstein (1993).
  16. This is increasingly apparent at major tournaments such as the World Cup, when the carnival atmosphere before and during matches is often a strikingly sanitized, simulated version of supporter passion. The most extreme illustrations occur when

a dead atmosphere among thousands of fans suddenly changes into highly animated collective behavior when the television cameras come into view.

17. Nor should one assume that an attempt to protect the interests of traditional supporters is an act of xenophobia toward those who want to join the football spectator community. There is no credible a priori argument that states that other spectator categories, including flâneurs, are incapable of harboring deeply intolerant attitudes towards some other communities. In addition, as Walzer (in Carleheden & Gabriëls, 1997, p. 129) himself argued, one may quite easily identify those genuinely intolerant communities and seek to remove such traditions, but all the while encourage the community members to adapt to the new conditions, to redefine their values.

## AUTHOR

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**Richard Giulianotti** is a senior lecturer in sociology at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland. His research interests are in the sociological study of football and sport in a global context. He is author of *Football: A Sociology of the Global Game* (Polity, 1999), and he has coedited several books, including (with Gary Armstrong) *Fear and Loathing in World Football* (Berg, 2001) and (with Gerry P. T. Finn) *Football Culture: Local Conflicts, Global Visions* (Frank Cass, 2000).

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