# Synthesizing Support: Analyzing Manchester United's Aestheticization of Solidarity from an MCDS Perspective

When Manchester United Football Club (MUFC) publicly announced the signing of Alexis Sanchez in 2018, it was done through a short video that purported to demonstrate the rich traditions and history of the club, its deep connection with its fanbase, and the strength of its support. However, locating this video within the broader social order where elite football clubs like MUFC essentially operate as for-profit corporations shows how it functions as an instantiation of the market-oriented discourse and rhetoric that has penetrated sport in general (and here, football in particular). Taking up a Multimodal Critical Discourse Studies perspective, and via an analysis of the semiotics of sound, intertextuality, and the visual, this article shows how MUFC positions itself sympathetically and in so doing conceals its pursuit of profit. It shows how values of solidarity, organicity, and camaraderie are communicated and associated with MUFC and how the viewer is structured into identifying with MUFC instead of supporters as a collective group. Finally, it discusses how these tropes are aestheticized whilst outwardly claiming to deny that very pursuit, thereby masking the reconstrual of club-supporter relations as fundamentally exploitative brand-consumer relations.

Keywords: semiotics of sound; music and meaning; intertextuality; multimodal critical discourse studies; Battle Hymn of the Republic; Manchester United; professional football; brand consumer relations; Sports as Business; Glory Glory Man United

## Introduction

On 22nd January 2018, Manchester United Football Club (MUFC) announced they had signed Alexis Sanchez from Arsenal Football Club. What was peculiar about this was not the transfer in and of itself – after all, players moving between clubs is common in professional football at the elite level; rather, it was how the transfer was announced.

Prototypical player presentations involve a press conference being called with both the player and the head coach present. They then proceed with some version of the following: the player makes a show of signing a copy of his contract; player and coach then pose for photographs whilst jointly holding up the player's jersey; subsequently, player and coach field questions from the gathered media. The precise series of events is not particularly important – the key point here is that the norm in elite professional football is to publicly announce the acquisition of a player at a press conference. MUFC diverged from this norm, announcing Sanchez's acquisition by publishing a short video across their social media channels prior to holding the conventional press conference. Their unorthodox move paid off in terms of social media visibility – it was the "biggest United post on Instagram with two million likes and comments, the most shared United Facebook post ever, the most retweeted United post ever and #Alexis7 was the number one trending topic on Twitter worldwide" (Shread, 2018). Taking the video as a point of departure, this paper analyses the communicative work it does beyond merely sending out the simple message that MUFC had signed Alexis Sanchez.

The notion of synthesizing is relevant in two ways: first, the video synthesizes different modes – aural and visual modes are synthesized with intertextual references to multimodally communicate the notions of solidarity, camaraderie and organicity; second, it opens the notion of the synthetic – a nod to the broader, critical, argument that

MUFC's display of support and solidarity in this video is artificially constructed.

Interrogating the video as semiotic text, I aim to demonstrate how MUFC projects an organic image of solidarity and camaraderie with its supporters whilst ultimately manipulating this image for commercial ends. From a Multimodal Critical Discourse Studies (MCDS) perspective, I analyze how these values are multimodally constructed and communicated through the integration of the visual, the aural, and intertextual references; this is then situated within the broader landscape of consumerist and capitalist discourses in sport where elite football clubs function as profit-driven corporations whilst supporters are commodified and treated as consumers.

There are two main questions that guide the analysis. Firstly, I ask what values and qualities MUFC foregrounds in this video; and secondly, how the multimodal messages communicated in the video work to conceal the reconstrual of club-supporter relations as brand-consumer relations. Whilst this might appear to foreshadow a two-stage analytical process — whereby a descriptive semiotic analysis is followed by critical interpretation — such a clear distinction is difficult to maintain; neither should it be strictly maintained, for the value of the MCDS perspective is that it incorporates criticality into the analytical process itself.

Professional football as a sport has undergone a "rapid commercial transformation" in which it has become entwined with the business sphere (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2009, p. 63). This is not an isolated phenomenon; rather, it is symptomatic of the general ideological dominance of neoliberal politics and economics (Harvey, 2005; Stiglitz, 2006) in contemporary times that has come to affect football as an industry. The result is "the old motives for financial investment in clubs – combining sense of 'custodianship' with the egotistical lure of local or national status – have been

increasingly supplanted by the pursuit of profit" (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2009, p. 64). Exacerbating this phenomenon was the rise of televised football which heralded a seemingly ever-growing number of viewer-consumers willing to pay a premium to watch live football (Boyle & Haynes, 2004; Rowe, 2004). Perhaps in part due to the dominance of the English language worldwide, English football profited the most from the television revenue streams that "encouraged and underpinned the broader commodification and entrepreneurial transformation of English elite club football" (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2009, p. 67; also see Giulianotti, 1999). World-leading clubs such as MUFC, therefore, can legitimately be classified as profit-driven corporations whose commerical branding strategy often leverages on symbolic elements in the club's traditions and history (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2009, pp. 82–84). Walsh and Giulianotti (2006) label this the "Sports-as-Business" idea; in direct opposition is the way that sport tends to prefer displaying itself to the supporter – the "Manifest Image" where sport is seen as being pursued for non-commerical reasons such as the 'good' of the club or sporting glory and so on (p. 4).

The commodification of football has occurred as a consequence of the growing influence of "market rhetoric" (Radin, 1996) where the pursuit of profit is regarded as a teleological end. Consequently, "'supporters' and 'clubs' [have been] redefined as 'consumers' and 'brands' respectively" (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2009, p. 127). Whilst many supporters explicitly reject this characterization (Giulianotti, 2005), simply rejecting it does not necessarily make it any less true: elite clubs and football's governing institutions have steadfastly "avoided tackling [the] social issues relating to commodification" (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2009, p. 128) and continue to treat supporters as consumers. This is not to say that the Sports-as-Business model is necessarily incompatible with the Manifest Image of sport – football clubs could well

pursue both at the same time. However, because supporters insist on seeing themselves through the lens of the Manifest Image of sport, an interesting situation presents itself: elite clubs that subscribe to the Sports-as-Business idea must display the spectacle of the Manifest Image precisely so as to sustain the Sports-as-Business model – presenting as a non-commercial entity itself becomes a commercial strategy. This is market rhetoric taken to its logical end where its persuasive power lies in its very self-denial and disavowal; this is football as "a monetized and sometimes unbearable spectacle of … capitalism" (Critchley, 2017, p. 10); and this is precisely what makes elite professional football in general – and MUFC in particular – an appropriate site for a critical intervention.

**Data**

The video (2018) being analyzed was published by MUFC announcing the signing of Sanchez (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CCk30hIr1Sw). MUFC published the video across its Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram channels as well as on its official website on the afternoon of 22nd January 2018. A month later, the club launched its official YouTube channel and also published the video there. Whilst all the versions are identical in content, they were formatted differently across the various platforms. For instance, the version on Instagram has an aspect ratio of 1:1 [i.e., a square] whilst on Facebook it has an aspect ratio of 16:9 [i.e., a rectangle] and so on. The version on YouTube was used for analysis because it offered the highest resolution and sound quality. Sonic scripts are provided with accompanying timestamps (Tables 1 & 2) to aid readers in identifying the precise phases being discussed.

## Theoretical approach

The analysis takes up an MCDS perspective and primarily adopts Fairclough's (1992) and van Leeuwen's (1999) frameworks to show the messages that are constructed and communicated by the semiotic text as well as how it structures and positions the viewer.

### *Multimodal Critical Discourse Studies*

MCDS is located within the broader Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) or Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) programme which is "not a method, but rather a critical *perspective, position, or attitude*" (van Dijk, 2009, p. 62, italics in original). Its overarching aim is to study discursive patterns, make visible the way(s) in which power and social inequality are concealed, perpetuated or legitimized, and the ideological implications that follow as a result (Fairclough, 2003; Wodak & Meyer, 2009).

Because of its underlying concern with the perpetration and abuse of power, the texts that have come under the lens of CDS-based approaches have tended to be overtly political. Wodak & Meyer (2009), however, characterize the assumption that texts "have to be related to negative or exceptionally 'serious' social or political experiences or events" as a "frequent misunderstanding of the aims and goals of CDA" (p. 2) that would unnecessarily proscribe its emancipatory potential. "Any social phenomenon lends itself to critical investigation, to be challenged and not taken for granted" (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 2). Coupled with a better understanding of how popular culture and "entertainment media allow discourses to be realised through fun and participation" (Machin & Richardson, 2012, p. 343) the nature of research undertaken within the CDS tradition has broadened and this article follows that trend.

Despite the multifarious nature of methodology and analytical approaches in CDS,

perhaps due to its origins in Critical Linguistics there has been more than a degree of logocentrism at its heart. “[C]ommunication has become much more multimodal, yet most work in critical discourse analysis remains firmly monomodal, looking only at written and spoken language.” (van Leeuwen, 2013, p. 4003). MCDS addresses this critique by incorporating multimodality – “the idea that texts which linguists study create meanings not only through language but also through visual features and elements such as images, colour, the layout of pages, even through material objects and architecture” (Machin, 2013, p. 347) – into the CDS perspective.

The development of multimodality in applied linguistics has been significant not so much for its recognition that meaning making can happen via non-written modalities – after all, this has practically been taken for granted in a myriad of fields such as Cultural Studies, Media Studies and so on. In fact, what those “working mainly in linguistics, call ‘multimodality’ overlaps into many other fields where the visual, sound, design, gesture, etc., have long traditions of study” (Machin, 2013, p. 347) – and as such one ought to be wary of reinventing the wheel within the blinkered confines of one’s own discipline.

But what gives multimodality in applied linguistics – and, by extension, MCDS – a legitimate claim to being a differentiated approach in its own right is its theoretical commitment to a systematic description of the meaning potentials of various semiotic modes and how these are combined and realized in their particular social contexts to construct meaning (Machin, 2007) which “repudiates the received notion that individual semiotic modes can function as discrete carriers of meaning and instead conceives of communication as the interaction of multiple semiotic modes” (Roderick, 2018, p. 161).

***The semiotics of sound***

Musicology scholars have long studied music and meaning (see Cooke, 1959, for example). But the general emphasis on formalism in much of musicology has left it "fundamentally at odds with [most] CDA and *social* semiotic approaches to analysis" (Way & McKerrell, 2017, p. 11, italics in original). In contrast, van Leeuwen's (1999) approach accounts for a "*meaning potential* which will be narrowed down and coloured in the given context" (p. 10, italics in original). By considering the semiotic affordances of musical discourse, it offers a systematic account of the sound of music thus diverging from some of the more dominant approaches in musicology where music is treated as an object in itself.

The "semiotics of sound concerns itself with describing what you can 'say' with *sound*, and how you can interpret the things other people 'say with sound'." (van Leeuwen, 1999, p. 4, italics in original). Whilst van Leeuwen (1999) proposes six dimensions to sound, I focus on sonic perspective and distance, as well as sonic interaction, to demonstrate how the sounds in this video, through their constitutive elements, "can create relations between the subject they represent and the receiver they address" (p. 14).

*Sonic perspective and social distance*

Sound can be classified as "immersive" or "perspectival" (p. 30). Immersive sounds are single sounds that are generally deep with lots of bass, "fill spaces more completely", and "seem to come from everywhere at once" (p. 28). Perspectival sound, on the other hand, "hierarchizes elements of what is represented by placing some in the foreground, some in the middle ground and some in the background" and is created through the relative loudness of simultaneous sounds.

Perspectival sound can be categorized as Figure, Ground, or Field. A sound that is Figure is "treated as the most important sound, the sound which the listener must identify with, and/or react to and/or act upon" (p. 23); a sound that is Ground is "treated as still part of the listener's social world, but only in a minor and less involved way" (p. 23); and a sound positioned as Field is the least important and "treated as existing, not in the listener's social, but in his or her physical world" (p. 23). Here, it is imperative to bear in mind that as sound is a dynamic rather than static mode, these are not impermeable categories. A sound can move from one to another (e.g. from Figure to Ground and so on) and this change will also change the way one is invited to relate to it.

In addition, the experiential meaning potential of sound quality can realize the imagined social distance between the text and listener. It "creates [imaginary] relations of different degrees of formality between what is represented and the viewer or listener" (pp. 14-15). Experiential meaning potential here has to do with how one would have to be positioned to hear that type of sound. For example, to hear a sound like the rustle of a t-shirt, one would have to be physically very close to the individual unfolding it – certainly in their personal space. As such, it would suggest at least a personal, if not intimate, social distance.

*Sonic interaction*

In addition to analysing how sounds are positioned in relation to the listener, one could also analyse how they are positioned in relation to each other – this allows one to identify the relations between them and what they represent.

Sounds can occur simultaneously in an unstructured manner where "[p]eople may be involved in the same kind of musical activity at the same time and in the same place without actually playing or singing together" and "derive pleasure from this … sense of

belonging to a larger whole" (p. 78). Alternatively, simultaneous sounds could occur in a structured manner. Here, where participants are producing the same sounds, it is termed "unison" and can be differentiated according to the degree of blending of the individual sounds. They can be blended where individual sounds no longer stand out or unblended such that one is able to make out different sounds.

Unblended sounds could be hierarchized or be considered plural. In the case of hierarchy, some sounds are rendered as having greater dominance than others. As opposed to dominant sounds that are individually significant, non-dominant sounds have little value in and of themselves, making "small contributions which acquire value only in their whole" (p. 84). In the absence of hierarchy, and thus plurality, "all sounds would not only have value on their own, but also contribute equally to the whole." (p. 84). There is also the "possibility that they are parallel, 'saying' the same thing in a different way, or (literally or figuratively) 'at a different level', or opposing, 'saying' opposing things." (p. 84). As a result, the mix of sounds can result in "harmonious, cooperative interaction or in disharmonious, competitive and conflictual interaction." (p. 84).

***Intertextuality***

Because texts never stand alone in isolation, but in relation to each other, and are always calling upon one another (Foucault, 1972), in mapping meaning one must necessarily pay attention both to the individual text in question as well as its relationality to the other texts in its orbit. For it is the "inherent historicity of texts [that] enables them to take on the major roles they have in contemporary society at the leading edge of social and cultural change" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 102).

Of course, in the best traditions of multimodality, there is no reason intertextuality

needs to be restricted to written language. The intertextual sphere can be built visually through ideas, identities, and characteristics that are activated through pictorial representations and images (van Leeuwen, 2001). van Leeuwen (2017) also explores intertextuality occurring aurally, suggesting that music can index "sonic identity…expressed on the basis of cultural references" as part of a process where "existing music [is used] for their intertextual references" (p. 126). The history of a tune allows each subsequent use to draw on, and associate with, the previous emotions invoked by that tune through a process of "sonic linkage" (Arning & Gordon, 2006, p. 4) as well as "[borrow] all the…values that [have] become associated with the track" (Jackson, 2003, p. 109).

Fairclough (1992) distinguishes between "manifest" intertextuality and "constitutive" intertextuality (p. 104). In manifest intertextuality, "other texts are explicitly present in the text under analysis" – these could be "marked or cued by features on the surface of the text, such as quotation marks" or they could be more subtly invoked without being "explicitly cued" (p. 104). In contrast, constitutive intertextuality relates to "the configuration of discourse conventions that go into [a text's] production" (p. 104) whereby it draws on the conventions associated with particular genres. Fairclough (1992) terms this "interdiscursivity" to reflect and "underline that the focus is on discourse conventions rather than other texts" (p. 104) and uses intertextuality to refer to manifest intertextuality. I use the terminology similarly but propose an addition. The way Fairclough (1992) treats intertextuality and interdiscursivity as concepts suggests they have to do with a text calling upon elements of a prior text. Yet, it is entirely possible for meaning-making to occur when a text is reprised – explicitly replicated in its entirety – in a new and different context and neither intertextuality nor interdiscursivity captures this process. The concept of recontextualization (Caldas-

Coulthard, 2003) – where elements such as quotes are placed in a new text – comes closer to addressing this, but still does not account for the very specific case where a text is reprised entirely in another context. If anything, the greatest resemblance comes from the notion of *détournement* in the Situationist tradition (Debord, 2006) where a text is turned upon itself by changing its context. However, unlike the Situationists set out to do, this contextual reconfiguration does not necessarily have to be subversive – a text remaining unchanged whilst its surrounding context is modified can generate a new meaning simply by the text being carried over (*trans*) into a new context. Already within musicology, this process of meaning creation has been discussed and it is understood that "the way a musical utterance functions in a given social and cultural situation will change its meaning" (Zbikowsi, 2015, p. 149; see also Eyerman and Jamison, 1998). I suggest the term transtextuality to denote, in more general terms, the specific semiotic process whereby an entire text is identically reproduced and embedded in a different surrounding context such that the relationality between text and (new) context creates a new layer of meaning.

## Multimodal construction of meaning

### *Intertextual meaning*

Transtextuality, intertextuality, and interdiscursivity all play a part in constructing meaning in the text. These come from the historical associations and evolution of the musical text that is used as an aural backdrop to the video, its associated social practices, and the visual texts of Old Trafford – MUFC's stadium in Manchester, UK where they are based.

The transtextual component comes from the genealogy of the musical tune that *Glory Glory Man United* (*GGMU*) is set to. Whilst the lyrics of the musical text have been

changed, *GGMU* takes its tune from *Battle Hymn of the Republic* – a song that originated in the United States of America and whose narrative frames the author's "moment of poetic inspiration as an expression of Northern resolve" (Randall, 2005, p. 5). The origins of this song lie in "mid-nineteenth-century frontier camp meetings […] the world of the working-class poor" and "may have had several creators or might have resulted from group improvisation" (p. 15). And as the meter and rhythm of this tune index a strong sense of justice, righteousness, and sense of self (p.16), it is no surprise that the tune has been appropriated by football supporters as an expression of group identity – whilst *GGMU* is the version sung by MUFC supporters, other clubs such as Tottenham Hotspurs and Leeds United too have their own versions that reprise the same tune. In this way, the values of solidarity, camaraderie, and organicity are carried over into GGMU.

A second instance of transtextuality occurs through the emergence of the song *Solidarity Forever* in the United Kingdom in 1915. Reprising the same tune, but with different lyrics, this song "continues to hold up as the primary anthem of labor", "remains respected as the [labor] movement's theme" (Pietaro, 2011, p. 10) and is still routinely taken up by unions in their manifestations. The association of the tune with solidarity, camaraderie and organicity is strengthened as a result of this. *GGMU* itself was recorded by MUFC's players (Renshaw, 1983) and released prior to the 1983 Football Association Cup final. As a song first recorded by the players before subsequently being taken up by supporters in the stadium, the values of organicity as well as solidarity and camaraderie between players and supporters are intertwined with the performance of the musical text in the context of MUFC. Here, in addition to the historicity of the music that already invokes these values on a general level, one could say *GGMU*'s own context of creation and production ties them specifically to MUFC.

This is complemented by the visual intertextuality at play when Sanchez is shown entering the stadium, walking out onto the field, and standing in front of the Stretford End whilst the musical text resounds. These images are significant as *GGMU* has evolved into a terrace chant that supporters sing on matchdays at Old Trafford whilst the Stretford End is the section of the stadium that traditionally houses the club's most ardent supporters. Integrating the music, with its attendant historical associations, with these visual cues thus reinforces the notions of solidarity, camaraderie and organicity that have already been evoked aurally. This is further backed up by the layering of the sound of a roaring crowd in the background which suggests *GGMU* being sung amongst a large group of MUFC supporters.

It is also worth pointing out how the video visually invokes the trope of the theatre. In the shots where Sanchez is playing the piano, he is in the light whilst surrounded by darkness – like a performer would be lit whilst on stage; and when he is on the field, the spotlights are focused and trained upon him – similar to how a theatrical production would typically be lit with performers firmly in the spotlight. The visual reference to the theatre is particularly resonant in this context because Old Trafford is often referred to as the Theatre of Dreams – and as such, one could regard it as another supplement to the intertextual sphere that ties the values evoked in the video to MUFC.

In these multiple ways, the video does not rely solely upon the history of the musical text to bring forth the notions of solidarity, camaraderie, and organicity; rather, it goes one step further to fully exploit the filmic mode where the aural and visual modes are woven together. The history and associations of the musical text are interlocked with the visual texts of Old Trafford which invokes the social practices of the song's performative enactment in the traditions of MUFC – and this enables the associations of the musical text to be evoked in a similarly powerful, organic and collective manner.

Finally, whilst the transtextual and intertextual processes above demonstrate how discourses of solidarity, camaraderie, and organicity are mobilized, one ought to pay attention to the interdiscursive gesture. For, this allows one to see how the values emphasized in the video are aestheticized to conceal discourses of consumerism and profit-making; in other words, it demonstrates how MUFC displays the Manifest Image of sport even as the video itself is embedded within the discourse of Sports-as-Business. Whilst it depicts a 'behind-the-scenes' view of Sanchez joining MUFC, and communicates the attendant values of solidarity, camaraderie, and organicity, it follows some of the conventions of a corporate video. For instance, in its various sites of display, MUFC is visibly associated with the video as its creator and publisher through the prominent placement of its name and logo; a link is provided in its accompanying description caption for viewers to click through to MUFC's official website; and further links appended most visibly on Twitter and Facebook encourage viewers to purchase official MUFC merchandise. Displaying and drawing on Manifest Image of sport, however, allows MUFC to elide the profit objective that is conventionally associated with corporations and corporate videos. Here, it is important to point out that MUFC's pursuit of profit as a corporate entity does not necessarily negate the values that are communicated in the video; neither does it automatically render them inauthentic or illegitimate in some way. After all, the pursuit of profit and the values of solidarity, camaraderie, and organicity are not, in and of themselves, mutually exclusive. Rather, the interdiscursivity in this video speaks to how mobilizing the Manifest Image of sport in service of the Sports-as-Business model can be a strategy that backgrounds the pursuit of profit which ultimately makes it more difficult for supporters to identify how they are being redefined as consumers.

## *Sonic meaning*

### *Sonic perspective and social distance*

insert Table 1

Table 1 provides a summary of how sonic perspective and social distance work to construct a subject position that invites listeners to identify with Alexis Sanchez and MUFC whilst distancing supporters as a collective group. The first sound that one hears is GGMU being played on the piano – a song historically associated with MUFC and regarded as a club anthem of sorts. As such, one could regard it as symbolizing MUFC in this soundscape. It cuts in immediately at the start of the video and so in van Leeuwen's (1999) terms is Figure – the sound that the listener is expected to respond to (p. 23). The sonic quality of the music positions it close to the listener at a Personal distance – it is not played in a tense, projected manner as if meant for a large public audience (Machin & Richardson, 2012); rather, it is produced as a natural, relaxed sound as if meant for the individual listener (van Leeuwen, 1999, p. 27). This works together with the significance of the music to encourage the listener to identify closely with MUFC. In this way, MUFC is aurally brought into focus and held there as GGMU remains Figure for the next 16 seconds whilst Sanchez enters the locker room and wears his jersey. MUFC is thus kept in the foreground of the soundscape and one could read this as MUFC positioning itself as the dominant actor that the listener is expected to identify with.

Of course, if the listener does not happen to be a supporter of MUFC, and is unfamiliar with the texts of MUFC, this identification is likely to occur less strongly at this point; the casual listener is more likely to respond to the sound purely aesthetically – how one might react to a made-up advertising trill, for instance. For MUFC supporters, who are

most likely to view the video in the first place, they would probably recognize the significance of the tune, its association with the club, and as such they are likely to affiliate themselves with the sound and occupy the subject position that has been constructed.

One also hears the click of the locker room door being opened, followed by a rustling of fabric as Sanchez unfolds and then wears his jersey. GGMU continues to be Figure and these sounds are Ground – part of the listener's social world even as they are not directly involved in it.

Listeners are positioned close to Sanchez at a Personal or Intimate distance through the click of the locker room door, his gentle but perceptible footsteps, and the soft rustle of his jersey as he wears it. This also grants the listener privileged access to a place of privacy and intimacy – the sporting locker room is a place of high emotion and vulnerability. The rustling of fabric also signifies listeners being granted access to the process of changing which is something one usually does in private. One could also read this as listeners being granted access to the moment Sanchez is actualized as a part of MUFC.

This series of sounds could also be read as suggesting a metonymic relationship between Sanchez and MUFC where Sanchez is a constituent part of MUFC. GGMU that symbolizes MUFC is always Figure whilst the sounds associated with Sanchez are always either Ground and Field. Thus, whilst Sanchez is the main actor, this is only insofar as he is an MUFC player. In this world, MUFC is still the larger institution.

From 1(e) onwards, supporters are aurally represented. The sound of supporters cheering initially fades in as Sanchez pulls on his jersey – at this point it is Field and unlikely to be something listeners pay attention to (p. 23). It begins to fade up, however,

as Sanchez exits the locker room and walks towards the playing field. The sound moving from Field to Ground positions one alongside Sanchez – it mimics what he would hear as he leaves the private locale of the locker room and enters the public stage of the playing field. In this way, the listener is kept close to Sanchez whilst supporters are positioned as 'out there in the distance'.

The sonic quality of the roar is such that one only hears a collective sound without making out the exact words being said thereby ensuring that supporters as a group are held at a Public distance (p.27). Amidst this, GGMU remains Figure which suggests a hierarchical relation between MUFC and its supporters – the former is positioned as the dominant entity whilst the latter is collectively portrayed as external to the internal workings of the club and existing at a distance. The choral voices in the orchestra that plays during the second reprisal of GGMU, the only representation of real voices in this soundscape, are Ground and positioned at a Formal distance. The listener hears them as one might hear a choir as a member of the audience; and as it is Ground, it is represented as part of the listener's social world but neither the focus nor in the foreground of the soundscape. In these ways, one is encouraged to identify with MUFC but without identifying with the represented supporters at the expense of the club.

Listeners continue to be positioned at a Personal or Intimate distance to Sanchez and never standing amongst supporters. One hears Sanchez puffing out with different degrees of intimacy – sometimes gently, sometimes sharply – but these are all sounds that one would need to be close to him to hear (p. 27; also see Machin & Richardson, 2012). The sound of the supporters, however, is always hoarse and yelled – it is presented as general noise and as such rendered at a Public distance.

Towards the end of the clip, the roar of the supporters moves from Field to Ground but,

importantly, this never usurps GGMU which remains Figure. Here, one could read this as an attempt to confer a dimension of organicity to the soundscape. Whilst MUFC is rendered as the dominant actor in the soundscape, the sound of supporters roaring serves to soften this dominance and introduces the notions of solidarity and organicity to the soundscape. In fact, one could even say that representing support in this way strengthens MUFC's dominant position for it suggests it has the endorsement and backing of its supporters.

As a result of sonic perspective and distance being structured in this way, listeners are more likely to identify with Sanchez and MUFC. Solidarity and organicity are also emphasized through the manipulation of the sound of supporters cheering. Consequently, listeners are more likely to ultimately accept the reorientation of club-supporter relations.

*Sonic interaction*

insert Table 2

The sonic script in Table 2 summarizes how sonic interaction in this video works to represent Sanchez as part of the MUFC team and community as well as how it indexes solidarity and camaraderie. The first verse of GGMU begins as a musical monologue with the solitary sound of the piano. A complete absence of sonic interaction is rare in Western music and "tends to express extreme isolation and loneliness" (van Leeuwen, 1999, p. 72). The sense of loneliness is intensified visually and through the context of this video – Sanchez is shown playing the piano alone with nobody else in sight and he is a new player that has just joined MUFC. Thus, this initial monologic phase where he plays the piano alone constructs him as a solitary subject, being welcomed to his new 'family' at Old Trafford and MUFC. Sanchez's proficiency

playing the piano also suggests an instrumental expertise on his part that visually demonstrates the extent of his prowess and his mastery of a domain beyond football – positioning him as more gifted than the regular footballer; one could thus read the affordance of expertise that emerges from Sanchez's flawless musical performance as a promise of extraordinary talent that he is bringing to MUFC and his rendition of GGMU suggests he already appreciates MUFC's traditions and is about to forge a strong bond with the club.[1] Shortly afterward, the isolation is remedied with the introduction of solidarity and camaraderie. This happens through the sound of a crowd cheering that interacts with the piano in an unstructured manner. Both sounds play simultaneously now even though they are clearly not playing the same piece, or even playing together – rather, they both function as part of a larger whole. The unstructured sound of the crowd suggests a large group where everyone contributes in their own way to the overall conviviality even as no single member dominates. Now Sanchez's solo melody is no longer isolated – it is part of a melody, a larger musical unit.

The general narrative of Sanchez becoming a part of the MUFC 'family' is complemented visually because the sound of the crowd kicks in at precisely the moment Sanchez enters the locker room – the significance of which has already been mentioned. In this way, the interaction of sounds here aurally communicates Sanchez being welcomed into the MUFC community and this is visually integrated with what the viewer sees at the same time.

Sanchez's induction into MUFC and the resultant camaraderie is evident in the second

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[1] It is worth noting that Sanchez has performed extremely poorly since joining MUFC and it is precisely this musical mastery that is now ridiculed by supporters as a symbol of Sanchez promising much but delivering little.

reprisal where the piano melody is no longer a lone melody – even though in itself it is still a single sound, it is no longer unaccompanied. Instead, it is part of a group melody with vocals and an orchestral accompaniment. The sounds of the group vocals and the piano melody interact in non-unison and are not hierarchized – instead they exist in plurality – contributing harmoniously in their own way to the realization of the whole song (or even to glory, as the title suggests).

This is suggestive of the relation between an individual player and the rest of the football team – a player is merely one of the eleven in a team but expected to contribute in a singular yet cohesive way to the team's collective success. Solidarity is emphasized through the vocals being produced in unison and blended to the extent that one does not detect individual timbres. Thus, where previously Sanchez only contributed the melody of GGMU without the words, this lack is remedied through unification with the team such that the full musicality of the song is realized.

Whilst the primary sounds remain those that represent Sanchez and the rest of the playing team, the group accompaniment is not insignificant. It comprises the bass drum, snare drum and strings – together, however, they index neither unity nor individuality. Rather, between themselves they are a plurality of sounds that exist in parallel, complementary arrangements. In and of themselves, they do not communicate anything meaningful beyond providing a general supportive role. And it is noteworthy that whilst they are subordinate to the piano and vocals, they still interact harmoniously with them and contribute to making the song sound better than it would be without an orchestral accompaniment. One could regard this group of sounds as symbolizing the broader institutional support that MUFC provides – external to, and less directly relevant than the playing team, but still important to the overall success of the club.

Finally, it is noteworthy that the sound of the supporters remains is never rhythmically inducted into the music – whilst it co-occurs with the melody and vocals, it exists in an unstructured relation and one would be hard-pressed to say that it makes a significant difference to the overall musical quality of the song. One could say that, together with sonic perspective and distance, this works to portray the supporters as part of, but not crucial, to MUFC as an institution. In this sense, including the sound of supporters could be regarded merely as a rhetorical manoeuvre that evokes the theme of solidarity with supporters without seriously considering them as part of the MUFC 'family'.

***Integrating the sonic with the visual***

The values of solidarity, camaraderie, and organicity that are indexed through sound are reinforced through an integration with the visual elements of the filmic sequence. The video comprises two scenes that are distinctly unrelated beyond the fact that they share the same actor (Sanchez). In Scene 1, Sanchez is decked out in MUFC's colors and playing the piano; in Scene 2, he has yet to change into the jersey, and is entering the tunnel, walking into the locker room, wearing the MUFC jersey, and then walking out onto the pitch. At no point in the second scene does one ever see him walk past a piano.

The majority of the video consists of the second scene with shots from the first scene intermittently spliced throughout. Despite the lack of narrative coherence, splicing shots from Scene 1 throughout the progression of Scene 2 serves a rhetorical function. Because the video begins (0:00 – 0:03) and ends (0:32 – 0:34) with shots from Scene 1, the first and last things the viewer sees are Sanchez playing the piano. Together with the two other times (0:06 – 0:08 and 0:20 – 0:22) shots from Scene 1 are spliced in between Scene 2 through quick cuts, they visually remind the viewer constantly that the piano

music they hear is coming from Sanchez and contributes to the organicity of the moment. In the final shot of Sanchez at the piano (0:32 – 0:34), this is reinforced aurally when the sound of supporters cheering is faded up. Not only does this move emphasize the organicity of the music, it also adds a layer of solidarity and camaraderie, and as the final shot, this is the lasting impression of the video that the viewer is left with.

Solidarity and camaraderie are afforded further prominence by coordinating significant visual elements in the video with the rhythm of the music. As van Leeuwen (1985) reminds us, "for [. . .] an element to occur on the beat of the rhythm remains sufficient condition for it to be perceived as more prominent than other elements in the chain […] regardless of whether it is more important in an objective sense" (p. 222). The idea of Sanchez being welcomed into the MUFC community is emphasized by timing the shots where Sanchez enters the dressing room (0:07) and the field (0:16) with a rhythmic beat. In fact, the beat when Sanchez enters the dressing room is timed to occur together with the click of the opening door which draws greater focus to this symbolic moment. In this way, MUFC accentuates the image of itself as a welcoming community and adds to the overall trope of solidarity and camaraderie.

The metonymic relationship between Sanchez and MUFC that was previously aurally suggested is also visually communicated. This happens in quick succession at the beginning of the video twice through two similarly patterned series of shots (0:03 – 0:06 and 0:06 – 0:08). In both instances, they begin with a close-up of the MUFC logo with very little else in the frame and in focus; then, in the immediate next shot, the size of frame widens to allow more of Sanchez into the frame. In this way, a part-whole relationship is communicated where Sanchez is depicted as a part of MUFC. Sonic perspective and distance echo this such that Sanchez is presented both as a member and symbol of MUFC.

***Aestheticizing solidarity***

Through the manipulation of sonic and visual meaning, as well as their synthesis with the accompanying intertextual meanings, the viewer is structured into identifying with MUFC and associating the club with values of solidarity, camaraderie, and organicity. Interrogating the broader context of production of this semiotic text, however, shows how these ideas are aestheticized as part of a broader rhetorical strategy that conceals the larger trend of commodification of sport and the resultant reconstrual of club-supporter relations.

The sounds that one hears – as is the norm in motion pictures and advertisements – are likely to have been inserted post-production through foleying rather than recorded live. Foleying is essentially "the act of performing sound effects during postproduction to match the action of the picture" (Beck & Grajeda, 2008, p. 19). For instance, the sound of the crowd cheering (Table 2, 1e.) is not what a roaring crowd at Old Trafford actually sounds like; instead, it is a synthetic, generic, re-creation of a crowd producing noise. In attempting to portray and project organicity, MUFC have created sounds that viewers imagine to be real rather than the actual sounds themselves. Here, one is free to open up the Baudrillardian notion of the hyperreal (Baudrillard, 1994) in the sense that the sound in this video is *more real than real* – and it is this very sonic hyperreality that betrays its artificiality. Normally, this would not be a particularly significant observation – this is, after all, a genre norm. However, in this case it is particularly worth pointing out because this runs directly counter to the trope of organicity that the video seeks to elicit – effectively defeating it. For, it tells us that this is a synthesized version of organicity that is designed to persuade the viewer to accept what is being represented.

The illusory nature of the solidarity and camaraderie that is represented is also clear if one looks closely enough. Whilst MUFC supporters are aurally represented in the video

through the soundtrack, visually, one only sees empty seats – it is far easier to layer an audio track of supporters roaring their team on than to actually do it visually – which is what betrays the synthetic nature of the entire production. It is not supporters or their support that is being represented; rather, it is the spectacle of supporters that is being represented and abused.

Adding this layer of solidarity, organicity, camaraderie and drawing on the trope of the working-class whilst radically excluding the discourses of consumerism and profit allows MUFC to conceal its exploitation of supporters where the supporter is treated as a unit of profit. In this way, even as club-supporter relations are recast as brand-consumer relations, this video is an example of a discursive strategy that allows MUFC to mask the very reconstrual itself such that supporters are not even able to challenge or contest this reconstitution and transformation of relations.

The spectacle of solidarity MUFC puts forth here works to persuade its supporters that MUFC need not be perceived nor treated as a corporation. Coupled with how football supporters tend to see themselves as obliged to remain loyal to their club (Giulianotti, 2005) – something which deprives them of the choice and freedom to take their money elsewhere – this leaves supporters in a particularly precarious and vulnerable position open to continual exploitation by clubs commodification of them; without being able to articulate the transformation of relations in the first place, supporters cannot question or resist MUFC's recasting of club-supporter relations as brand-consumer relations.

The way this video strategically appropriates and manipulates the Manifest Image of sport by displaying the values of solidarity, camaraderie and organicity speaks to the persuasive power that performatively denying the Sport-as-Business model holds; and aestheticizing these values as part of the explicit denial allows MUFC to conceal and

distance itself from the commodification of supporters that it practises. In so doing, it allows MUFC to buttress the Sport-as-Business model that it ultimately subscribes to.

**Conclusion**

In this article, I present a critical multimodal analysis of MUFC's video presenting Alexis Sanchez. Whilst overtly communicating the basic message that they had signed Alexis Sanchez, MUFC simultaneously uses it to position itself as a socially responsible football club that remains in touch with its history, tradition, and supporters. It foregrounds the values of solidarity, camaraderie, and organicity and encourages viewers to identify with MUFC whilst concealing its objective of profit as a corporation. In displaying this Manifest Image, the broader, contemporary context of Sport-as-Business within which club-supporter relations have been reconstrued as brand-consumer relations is kept hidden.

Because of space constraints, the scope of this article is necessarily limited. Whilst I have attempted to sketch the contemporary trend of the corporatization of sport and football against which this video ought to be viewed, this has not been laid out in deep detail. This is because in choosing which level(s) of analysis (cf. Fairclough, 1995) to devote most attention to, I have elected to offer a social semiotic account that focuses in the main on the first two levels (text and processing analyses) which means there remains a research gap. Simon Critchley (2017) argues that "we require a vigorous and rigorous critique of the corrupt transnational corporate structure of football" (p. 12) and this paper could serve as a small stepping stone for further research in that vein. Commodification, as a phenomenon, certainly deserves far more attention. As much as this paper has focussed on demonstrating how supporters are commodified, there is something to be said about how Sanchez too is commodified and offered up to

supporters as more than just a footballer as part of a marketing strategy that MUFC consciously uses to maximize and increase its reach and visibility especially on social media (Mitten, 2019). There are other formal dimensions of the video that I have not attended to very much as well. Lighting, for instance, is something I have only briefly alluded to but could certainly be explored together with other visual elements in greater detail. However, as Rick Iedema (2001) reminds us, the aim of a social semiotic analysis is not to provide an exhaustive analysis:

> [S]ocial semiotic analysis is an interpretative exercise, and not a search for 'scientific proof'. Its purpose is to describe how texts construct 'realities', and to argue the sociohistorical nature of their assumptions and claims. […] So rather than search for further proof, we should think about how the filmic mode has been exploited to serve specific interests. (pp. 198-99)

I have attempted to respect the spirit of this message and lay out how this video works to sustain MUFC's dominance over its supporters by continuing to disempower them in (re)presenting cold brand-consumer relations as convivial club-supporter relations.

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