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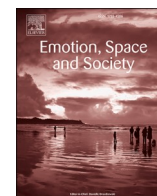
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Making the football stadium homely: Manchester City's relocation from Maine road to the Etihad

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ABSTRACT

Much geographical literature concerning home focuses on its emotional potency. This paper explores how football supporters consider their club's stadium as a 'home'. However, this sense of homeliness can evaporate when clubs relocate to new stadia, rupturing matchday routines and feelings of belonging. This is exemplified by the relocation of Manchester City Football Club from their former home ground Maine Road to the Etihad Stadium in 2003, leaving many longstanding supporters disoriented and bereft. We explore how in response, the club have sought to make the Etihad feel more homely through three key approaches: foregrounding continuities through generating nostalgia and heritage, acknowledging fan cultures and promoting interactivity. More broadly, the paper contributes to expansive and relational understandings of home, demonstrating how feelings of homeliness can extend beyond a single site as football fans move through the spaces surrounding a football stadium.

1. Introduction

There has been rising interest in 'home' (Blunt, 2005), a complex, multi-scalar concept that can equally refer to 'house, land, village, city, district, country, or, indeed, the world', transmitting the associations of one scale to others (Sopher, 1979: 130). This may range from an affective connection with dwelling place, locality, region or nation shaped by continuity, conviviality and ownership. Home is typically replete with personal and group memories and relates to emotional connections formed between people and place over time; as Ratnam (2018: 1) explains, 'home is an "affective construct" where homely feelings can encompass a combination of security, familiarity, comfort, and belonging'. Subsequently, loss or destruction of 'home' is associated with great physical, emotional and psychological damage to the dispossessed (Porteous and Smith, 2001).

Although much literature concerning home investigates the domestic sphere, sports stadia – the focus of this paper – can be considered as 'spiritual homes' (Charleston, 2009; Ramshaw and Gammon, 2010), in which 'return journeys' over time become a 'sticking point' for fan identity (Baker, 2021: 193). Since a sense of home can emerge from matchday routines that foster comfort, place attachment and shared memories, this can be ruptured when football clubs relocate to new

stadia, in turn generating 'displacement anxieties' (Kelsall, 2000). In 2003, Manchester City Football Club moved a few miles from their previous home ground Maine Road – considered by most fans as the 'spiritual home' of the club – to the contemporary Etihad Stadium (Edensor and Millington, 2010). Many longstanding supporters did not initially feel the same homely and 'topophilic' (Tuan, 1974) connections with the new stadium, generating some antipathy towards the club together with a somewhat deflated match-day atmosphere (Edensor, 2015; Steadman et al., 2021).

Rather than being based on a single empirical study, this paper draws on the authors' first-hand matchday observations at the Etihad Stadium up to the end of Season 2021–2022, generated through an interconnected series of past research projects into atmosphere, matchday routines and branding (Edensor, 2015; Edensor and Millington, 2008, 2010; Edensor et al., 2021; Millington et al., 2021; Steadman et al., 2021). These papers should be referred to for substantive methodological details. Furthermore, all authors regularly attend Manchester City matches, two as longstanding season ticket holders. Accordingly, the 'emplaced' involvement of the authors' own bodies was a useful source of knowledge about people's emotional and affective experiences of Manchester City's 'home' (Pink, 2015). Drawing on insights attained through past projects and first-hand observations, we explore how the

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club has sought to ameliorate supporters' lingering feelings of alienation through placemaking interventions to engineer a sense of homeliness.

We focus on three ongoing approaches that seek to produce homely qualities: the production of nostalgia and heritage, the honouring and representation of fan cultures, and the creation of interactive features and events. In doing so, we address broader challenges in relation to how communities experience regeneration in a context in which placemaking practices stand accused of reproducing over-determined, sterile, and disenchanting places (Julier, 2005; Penny and Redhead, 2009). We analyse the feelings of homeliness generated within new stadium surroundings and emphasise a more expansive understanding in which home is always relational and extends beyond a single site. We first explore the homely qualities of City's former home stadium Maine Road, before discussing the stadium move and ongoing homemaking and placemaking interventions at the Etihad.

2. The homely routines and sensations of Maine road

The notion of 'home' is prevalent in sport; indeed, multiple types of home can become associated with a sports stadium: the home of a sport, a team, fans or a sporting star. Most commonly, football stadia are termed the 'home' ground of a club (Charleston, 2009). Stone (2007: 175) suggests that football structures everyday life, as fans regularly organise their schedules to attend matches. For many supporters, these habitual routines undergird a 'topophilic affinity' for their team's 'home ground' (Ramshaw and Gammon, 2010). Historic football stadia also serve as pilgrimage sites for distant fans who wish to visit a club's spiritual home (Edensor et al., 2021). Devoid of any negative identifications that may be associated with the domestic sphere (for instance, where the home is considered to be a site of fear, stasis and oppression, see Whitzman, 2007), the stadium is commonly regarded as a place of 'convenience, efficiency, leisure, ease, pleasure, domesticity, intimacy and privacy' (Rybczynski, 1988: 231). The body is comfortably relaxed, able to scream and rage at referees, the team's players and opponents, and to sing and clap unrestrainedly, for fans are able to 'loosen their emotional armour' within the home ground (Schäfer and Roose, 2010: 233). The football home is made by the accretion of repetitive habitual enactions, by fans' individual and collective memories and familiar engagements with space and other regular match-going fans. Accordingly, the home ground is sedimented in unreflexive affective, emotional and sensory experiences over time that foster the ongoing emergence of fan cultures and contribute to the evolution of homely atmospheres (Baker, 2021).

Designed by renowned designer, Archibald Leitch, Maine Road opened in 1923. Memories of the old home ground resonate with Tuan's (1974) concept of 'topophilia' as the affective and sensory embroilment that emerges over time with a particular place. As Bale (2000) claims, this has been critical to the emergence of modern football identity, culture and practice. Strong feelings of home (Belford and Lahiri-Roy, 2019; Liu, 2014) were cultivated inside Maine Road, where fans often occupied the same spot for years, often decades, next to the same familiar faces. As Ratnam (2018: 6) observes, sensory experiences of 'touching, smelling, hearing, seeing, and tasting' are crucial to home-building and solicit feelings of familiarity and comfort. Through their matchday routines, fans developed strong memories of the half time smell of Bovril, the taste of pies, the waft of cigarette smoke, and sounds of fan songs and chants. For 80 years, Maine Road was continuously reproduced through the temporary occupation of fans; it became a homely place of expressive emotional attachment to friends, family members, fellow spectators and the team.

Charleston's (2009) account of focuses solely on the football stadium itself whereas we foreground a more expansive notion of homeliness in emphasising the relationships of stadia to the neighbourhoods in which they are located. For 'home' is also grounded in the habitual match day routines of fans in and around the ground. As Richards et al. (2022: 2) insist, the match day experience 'often begins from the moment a sports

fan leaves their house and starts their journey to the ground'. Maine Road was situated in a densely populated working-class community, subsequently becoming a multi-ethnic neighbourhood. The streets and spaces around Maine Road epitomised a classic Mancunian working-class landscape, row after row of small, redbrick terraced houses and back-alleys, interspersed with cornershops, newsagents, and pubs. Accordingly, fans' matchday routines extended into a wider space of paths, fixtures, familiar textures and stopping points to produce a realm of belonging, conviviality and atmosphere (Edensor and Millington, 2010). This enduring, remembered familiarity is captured by Thomas, 2018: 'a face appearing in the window of a nearby house; a passing train; the chimneys and factories of local industry; a distant range of hills'.

It is through the regular, rhythmic patterns of use over an extended period that a temporal and spatial sense of place and home is bestowed (Lefebvre, 1996: 204). In this sense, Pink, 2007 emphasises our involvement with 'a continuous process of emplaced engagement with the material, sensory, social and cultural contexts in which we dwell', along with a practical competence, ease of inhabitation and orientation. For the following of familiar, regular paths and points of spatial and temporal intersection routinise action in space. Linked by the routes down which fans drive and walk, the points of intersection, the 'activity spaces' (Massey, 1995) at which they meet friends, shop, eat and drink, supporters co-ordinate and synchronise activities (Hill et al., 2022). These banal movements collectively constitute the time-geographies of match days (Hägerstrand, 1975) as fans' trajectories separate, intersect, and merge as they near the stadium. The accumulation of repetitive, collective choreographies of congregation, interaction, rest and relaxation becomes both sedimented in individual bodies and grounded in the shared spatio-temporal paths that constitute 'place-ballets' (Seamon, 1980). These intimate temporalities and spatialities intensify a sense of homely belonging (Ratnam, 2018) as 'geographical memories' stack up (Hague and Mercer, 1998), with affective and sensory recollections of home stadium's familiar neighbourhoods supplementing significant memories of the stadium and unforgettable matches staged there.

This affective, sensory belonging can also be captured through the concept of atmosphere, which Böhme, 1993 suggests 'seem [s] to fill the space with a certain tone of feeling like a haze'. Indeed, prior research confirms how the atmosphere experienced on match days can be generated through fans' journeys through surrounding spaces - on public transport, pre-match gatherings at home and in pubs where fans congregate for a pre or post-match pint (Hill et al., 2022; Steadman et al., 2021). Atmospheres at Maine Road were transmitted between expectant fans as they headed towards the stadium, by their dense chatter and chanting, the shouts of traders selling fan paraphernalia, the clip-clop of the police horses that galloped to sort out trouble between rival fans, the buzz of radios, the smell of tobacco smoke, the shadows of the terraced streets, and the channelling of bodies through narrow alleyways. On match days in and around the Maine Road stadium, these sensory and affective intensities resonated with Anderson, 2009 suggestion that atmospheres can be considered as an 'affective "excess" through which intensive space-times can be created'.

The 2002–2003 season was the last season football was played at Maine Road. The final game was accompanied by an outpouring of emotion, including grief and nostalgia. For example, as one fan reflected (Steadman et al., 2021: 142), she was 'very sad to leave Maine Road and cried lots on the last day of the season'. This home from home was to be no more. Unlike the disgruntled former fans who boycotted Manchester United's home ground of Old Trafford by creating new club FC United, removing themselves 'rather than having the stadium removed from them' (Brown, 2010: 168), Manchester City fans did not choose to leave their home. The Maine Road stadium was demolished and replaced by a housing estate. Although only scant visible markers signify that the ground once existed, the memories of the match day experience linger in the memory of fans and continue to evoke a powerful sense of identity, nostalgia and loss.

3. Moving home

The transformation of football spaces belongs to a greater geographical process through which formerly place-based practices, experiences and movements become progressively disembedded from their familiar spatial milieu, generating profound feelings of nostalgia, displacement and loss (Penny and Redhead, 2009). These former homely realms are increasingly replaced by shopping malls, retail and leisure complexes, industrial estates, theme parks, airports and other spaces of transit. Relph (1976) labels these standardised, exchangeable and uniform realms 'placeless', while Harvey (1989) regards them as exemplary of 'serial monotony'. Augé, 1995 deploys the notion of 'non-place' to delineate how such functional sites are primarily organised to facilitate transit, minimise idiosyncratic distractions and facilitate consumer expenditure, in opposition to spaces of 'dwelling' that are 'relational, historical and concerned with identity'. These widespread developments stoke cultural anxieties about the diminution of local 'character' and detachment from place that culminates in a tenuous, fragile sense of belonging. Collective sporting memories can become ruptured when sports stadia are demolished as part of urban regeneration plans, as with Dongdaemun Baseball Stadium, home of the first Korean baseball match (Lee, 2017).

The replacement of old by new stadia has similarly triggered disquiet amongst fans that football clubs as key signifiers of local identity, history, memory and ritual are being detached from the cities in which they live, threatening feelings of homely rootedness accrued over time (Hague and Mercer, 1998). In the English Football League, no ground relocations occurred in the 30 years prior to 1988, but since then there have been over 30. In addition, many existing stadia have been substantially remodelled to accommodate more seating following recommendations in the Taylor Report (Home Office, 1989) about safety following the Hillsborough stadium disaster (Bale, 1993). Many clubs have left working-class neighbourhoods and the grounds to which fans become habituated, moving to sites that can accommodate parking, more leisure facilities, large retail outlets, restaurants, museums, corporate hospitality facilities and conference centres as part of a commercial thrust to create new multifunctional stadia (Edensor et al., 2021). Indeed, Manchester City have progressively added a superstore, museum and stadium tour, food trucks, hospitality suites, corporate boxes and conference facilities. As Richards et al. (2022) note, home stadia may also host live music concerts and other local sports teams, erasing a former sense of exclusive belonging (Penny and Redhead, 2009). The Etihad Stadium exemplifies this instrumental design rationality.

While contemporary stadia afford spectators unobstructed views and greater comfort, Bale (2000) suggests that they facilitate more intense surveillance strategies, constituting 'isotopic enclaves' in which fan behaviour is tightly monitored at the expense of expressiveness and playfulness. With regulations policing alcohol consumption, standing and even the content of crowd chants, the potential for carnivalesque excess to emerge is reduced (Turner, 2013).

CCCTV and crowd control measures are also more effectively mobilised in the typically expansive surroundings outside the stadium in contradistinction to the narrow network of streets and alleys of many older stadia environs. Many critics and fans regard these developments with ambivalence. Silk (2004) refers to them as 'sterile sporting space', while Giulianotti and Robertson (2004) regard them as exemplary of deterritorialisation through which football clubs become detached from place as part of globalization processes, including sponsorship, the sale of global television rights to corporate media conglomerates and lucrative stadium naming rights (Millington et al., 2021). Ritzer and Stillman (2001) suggest contemporary football stadia epitomize the disenchanting effects of McDonaldisation with their rational imperatives for efficiency, predictability, calculability and control, priorities that were far less prominent in the designs of older stadiums and neighbourhoods.

City's relocation resulted from a strategic regeneration decision to attract the 2002 Commonwealth Games to Manchester, and to anchor the ensuing redevelopment at a new stadium in a substantial brownfield site in an area of high deprivation. In addition to the football stadia, the area houses an athletics stadium, the National Squash Centre, the National Cycling Centre and a Regional Tennis Centre. Following a take-over by wealthy Abu Dhabi investors in 2008, the stadium was expanded, and a neighbouring brownfield site developed to accommodate a smaller stadium and the club's training and fitness complex. This enlarged sports-zone was subsequently renamed the Etihad Campus. For Manchester City, the move was financially expedient, securing its long-term future. More broadly, this large redevelopment aligns with wider urban renewal ambitions to reconfigure Manchester as a global city. Subsequently, the Etihad brand has become embedded, reflecting the city's neoliberal 'entrepreneurial script' (Peck and Ward, 2002), yet the construction of the stadium followed standard design narratives articulated by architects and urban regeneration specialists.

Consequently, it contrasts sharply with the idiosyncratic charm of Maine Road, dispensing with discrete stands and constituting a fully enclosed arena surrounded by a typically smooth bowl-like, fully seated structure, with fans segregated into segmented zones. The stadium possesses an innovative roof design and is illuminated with auratic blue lighting at night yet overall, unlike the loose and variegated landscape around Maine Road, City fans are confronted with a much smoother, functional and generic place to gather and watch football. Consequently, the Etihad was often described as a soulless place, comparable to other 'indistinguishable edifices in a transient culture' (Stride et al., 2013: 759) further homogenising the football experience (Penny and Redhead, 2009).

Although closer to central Manchester than Maine Road, the Etihad is situated within much sparser environs that offer few of the abundant affordances found around the old ground. The rich tapestry of sedimented and emotive experiences of the stadium and its environs (Edensor and Millington, 2010) had accumulated over decades, to become for many City fans, a topophilic site of habitual inhabitation (Stone, 2007). Whereas fans had developed an intimate knowledge of the Rusholme and Moss Side, a super-diverse part of the city, the area around the new stadium has been subject to mass deindustrialisation and redevelopment since the 1960s, removing much of the historic urban fabric. Consequently, there are few places around the stadium for fans to gather before and after matches. Unlike the myriad of pathways fans might have navigated to get to Maine Road, the routes to the Etihad are more restrictive, bisected by busy roads and run alongside industrial dereliction and banal housing. These more extensively planned and segregated spatialities and the standardised design of the Etihad campus confounded expectations amongst fans that they might rebuild an intimate connection with place over time.

When fans initially attended the Etihad it felt unhomely and disorienting for many, since familiar fellow supporters, players and songs were present but in a peculiar new setting. With fans becoming disconnected, even apathetic, the formerly fervent match atmospheres diminished (Edensor, 2015). Indeed, the 2006–2007 Premier League, 2007 reports how the Etihad was regarded as producing the second worst atmosphere in the Premier League, a situation exacerbated by the underwhelming performances of the team. Most fans considered these subdued moods inferior to the raucous terraces of Maine Road, where a potent atmosphere waxed and waned during matches (Steadman et al., 2021).

This atmospheric decline was also noticed by stadium management, who responded with attempts to ameliorate the sedate ambience, most notoriously during a September 2005 fixture against Bolton Wanderers, with fans baffled, outraged and embarrassed to hear pre-recorded chants played over the stadium tannoy, triggering relentless mockery from opposition supporters. The episode revealed the club's failure to understand fan culture and identity.

This resonates with other contexts in which social groups negotiate

new and unfamiliar terrain, notably with how migrants might experience challenges, 'straddling' multiple homes and spheres of belonging, feeling they have one foot 'here' (the new home) and 'there' (the old home) (Belford and Lahiri-Roy, 2019; Liu, 2014; Waite and Cook, 2011). Gryzmala-Kazłowska's (2018) examine how migrants negotiate their attachments to multiple places they might call home. Rather differently, in the context of a lost social club, Hochschild (2010) uses the notion of 'place-work' to describe how social groups contest and mutually construct places of collective belonging. Both examples suggest there is a point of resolution: if left to time, then fans might build a repository of cherished emotions to undergird a newfound connectivity to place.

However, also in 2005, the club initiated a more sophisticated branding exercise, *This is Our City*, to cultivate fan loyalty and combat a perceived detachment from place. By building on established tropes in fan culture, the campaign mischievously recycled myths that resonated with City fans, portraying them as authentic, local, loyal and working class, contrasting with the Global Other, Manchester United fans, who it was implicitly suggested, were corporate and largely outsiders to the city (Edensor and Millington, 2008). Such complexity questions those who critique developments at Manchester City as symptomatic purely of the game's commercialisation. Rather, as Giulianiotti and Robertson (2004) suggest, football's recent history might better exemplify the fluid, shifting and complex flows intertwining the global-local nexus (Millington, et al., 2021). Accordingly, the *This is Our City* campaign might herald a focus on devising more sustained strategies to solicit a sense of home.

4. Making the etihad homely

As we have discussed, feelings of home and belonging can extend beyond the football stadium (Baker, 2021) and pervade the surrounding environs. The sensory and affective qualities of the spaces in the vicinity of Maine Road to which fans became accustomed and were sedimented in their memories were absent at the Etihad. The shared convivial routines and cultural practices, rich atmospheres, deep sense of history and nostalgia embedded in the material fabric and the interactive spaces in which fans moved, met and ate had to be recreated at the new stadium. Yet this space was inimical to the emergence of such qualities, with its generic design, intensive regulation, wide open spaces and the dearth of meeting, drinking and eating places on the way to the ground. In response, in the past decade the club have undertaken an extensive redesign of the exterior precinct and interior concourses of the Etihad to foster a more homely place and atmosphere. Although well established in retailing and other commercial contexts (Hill et al., 2022), the potential for a managed approach to atmospherics at football stadia has been largely ignored by club owners. In this context, Manchester City's material and sensory placemaking interventions have focused upon three key elements, all of which contribute to the generation of match-day atmospheres: fostering a sense of nostalgia, heritage and continuity, honouring and representing City's fan culture, and developing interactive attractions in the stadium's precinct.

4.1. Nostalgia, heritage and continuity

Bringing the 'old' to the 'new' (Penny and Redhead, 2009), heritage is honoured at several sites around and within the Etihad, marking the stadium as contiguous with the club's identity rather than as an abrupt break. Since 2000, over 100 statues of former footballers, managers and owners have been situated adjacent to stadia and in prominent civic spaces (From Pitch to Plinth, n.d.). Following this trend, at the Etihad, over the duration of season 2021–2022, the club commissioned the installation of three statues designed by sculptor Andy Scott that honour the contribution to the team's success of three recent former players: iconic Belgian captain, Vincent Kompany, gifted Spanish midfielder David Silva, and Argentinian Striker, Sergio Aguero who scored a late goal that won the Premier League title for Manchester City in

2011–2012 (see Fig. 1). Fans now congregate to take photographs of themselves, friends and family members adjacent to these sculptures. These more contemporary figures supplement the older likenesses of Colin Bell and Bert Trautman that reside in the club's museum.

Additionally, huge photographic panels have been affixed to the stadium walls that chart the club's history (Millington et al., 2021), akin to the historical sporting photographs used to signify Twickenham Stadium as the home of English rugby (Ramshaw and Gammon, 2010). One depicts the club's predecessor team, Gorton St Marks, in 1884, with club officials sporting bowler hats, watch chains and

Waistcoats (see Fig. 2). Others recall major team triumphs across the 20th century, former stadiums, and the launch of City's women's team. Importantly, the assiduous marking of these key events in the club's history incorporates the move to the Etihad as one occasion in an unbroken historical trajectory, construing home as conveying a sense of precedence and stability.

In the Etihad's precinct, these nostalgic elements are supplemented by a few kiosks that sell match-day programmes. Clad in collages of photographic images from programmes of various vintage, they evocatively conjure up older visual styles and language and stir memories of what was formerly a more central part of the match day experience. The embedding of club history into the fabric of new stadia mirrors wider practices of exhibiting elements of heritage to counter fears of a loss of identity and sense of place (Harrison, 2013). The nostalgic designs displayed certainly undergird the enduring relationships of fans with the club and reinforce shared memories of particular teams and momentous events, transferring them to new home grounds to assuage anxieties about a break in continuity. As Belford and Lahiri-Roy (2019: 66) note, 'the making of home is about binding the temporal in creating both pasts and futures while inhabiting the now'.

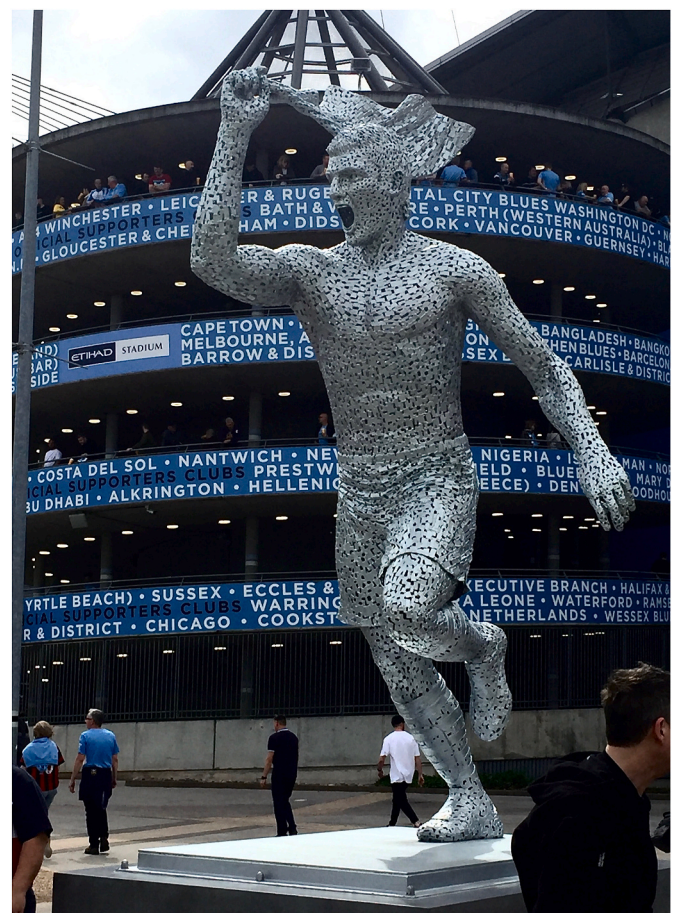


Fig. 1. Statue of Aguero in front of vinyl wrap detailing supporter locations.



Fig. 2. Photographic panel of St Mark's, predecessor club of Manchester City.

4.2. Honouring fans and fan culture

Memory is also central to another important space at the Etihad: the club's memorial garden, at which fans scatter the ashes of relatives, and lay flowers, cards and other tributes. Here, deceased fans have their remains implanted in the soil adjacent to the stadium, creating an irrevocable emotional link that sacralises place. A further feature, now removed, that acknowledged the essential role of fans to the club were two vinyl wraps that covered the large exterior pillars supporting the spiral stairways that ascend to upper-level seating. Imprinted upon one were the names of the thousands of season card holders; the other was inscribed with the numerous places across greater Manchester, the UK and beyond at which fans are domiciled (see Fig. 1). This display prompted fans to scan the text to seek their names and the places from which they come, entrenching their relationship with place.

Fan culture is also recognised in a medley of images and texts referring to old styles, experiences, fixtures and events, shared nostalgic elements that resonate with many older supporters and exemplify how home-making practices are 'about (re)creating 'soils of significance' (Belford and Lahiri-Roy, 2019: 66). Especially in the inner concourses, shared memories are emphasised in the depiction of stories, images, affects and sensations that emerge from fan culture and experience. The most impressive, entertaining and sophisticated element are the large wall panels that detail fans' experience of their introduction to watching Manchester City, 'My First Match' (Millington et al., 2021). Deploying innovative graphics and imagery, numerous accounts from a wide generational range of fans are related in diverse comic, emotional, nostalgic and convivial tones. Young fans are overawed by the atmosphere, the colours, the size of the crowd and the noise; older fans focus on favourite players and key matches, accompanying family members and friends, and pre-match rituals. The short stories incorporate both experiences at Maine Road and at the Etihad, once again signifying the continuities in watching football as a City fan, transferring old memories to the new space, and creating 'straddled' belongings between the two club homes (Waite and Cook, 2011). These panels testify to the affective and sensory attachments supporters feel to club, team, stadium and surroundings in the broader realm of fan culture. They do not ignore the nostalgia about Maine Road that continues to linger amongst many fans and demonstrate a capacity to honour fans in a respectful, affectionate fashion (see Fig. 3 and 4).

Various other graphics also feature club history and fan culture across the concourse walls. There is a specific representation of Aguero's famous last-minute goal in the final game of the 2011–2012 season against Queens Park Rangers in the style of a graphic, comic book sequence (see Fig. 5). This is supplemented by a complex, elaborate cartoon of over 250 incidents that have taken place at Maine Road and the Etihad Stadium, *Manchester City Mishmash*. Different sections focus



Fig. 3. My first match 1.



Fig. 4. My first match 2.

on particular memories: 'Funny Old Game' records over 25 comical incidents within the stadium where pitch-invading animals and amusing mishaps are prominent; 'Celebration' depicts over 60 rejoicing players and managers following crucial goals or victories; 'The Stadium, Banners and Signs' features 30 notable street and shops signs and banners held aloft by fans, expressive signifiers of homeliness (Brown, 2010). Sections are also devoted to famous fans, renowned eccentrics and fictional characters, 37 celebrated goals, injuries and dismissals, 35 awards and silverware, 26 managers and board members, and some 50 players. In fully acknowledging fan cultures, these idiosyncrasies could only have been devised by those with a longstanding, regular acquaintance with match days during which bizarre incidents, comical episodes, cult players and idiosyncratic chants have come to constitute shared memories.

Further design elements include a poster of the 'Moonies', the rather surreal City mascots Moonchester and Moonbeam, that entreats young fans to meet them at this point 30 min before kick-off. And hanging from the ceiling are two placards that repeat the words of two of City fans' most popular chants, 'WE ARE NOT, WE'RE NOT REALLY HERE' – sung to the tune of 'We Shall Not Be Moved' – and 'NA NA NANANA NA NANANA NA CITY!' following the melody of 'Hey Jude' (see Fig. 6).

According to Stride et al. (2013: 749), historical installations exemplify how 'football's history is being proactively taken beyond the confines of personal memories, archival material and artefacts owned by the football community to be displayed in a physical form visible to the wider public', as part of a rebranding of club specific identities that commemorates 'success, the evocation of nostalgia and the projection of a distinct and authentic visual identity'. Stride et al.'s point is overstated. For the club honours memories of individual fan experience and fan culture as well as broadcasting the over 140-year history of the club.



Fig. 5. Graphic representation of Aguero goal.



Fig. 6. Chants printed on boards in stadium concourse.

Personal and collective memories are combined with a longer historical approach to the club and its places.

The kind of nostalgic elements summoned here are integral to football fan culture, part of collective experience that is grounded in the regular ritual visits to the stadium through which a compendium of

memories is shared. Nostalgia is often characterized as a sentimental looking back towards an imagined, idealized past, part of a conservative refusal to face social and spatial change. However, nostalgic sentiments can accommodate progressive, even utopian impulses, as well as regressive stances, and mobilize a critical perspective that articulates scepticism towards the mooted advantages of new developments. They may recognize 'the value of continuities in counterpart to what is fleeting, transitory and contingent' (Pickering and Keightley, 2006: 923) and guard against cultural amnesia. While they are no doubt seeking to secure their commercial 'product', through these commemorative displays the club are perhaps also seeking to head off the intensification of detachment and alienation.

4.3. Interactivity

Manchester City have further sought to inculcate a sense of place by developing new interactive facilities and attractions. While the match day atmosphere pooled and intensified in the streets, pubs and alleyways as fans approached Maine Road, fans rarely lingered in the much smaller, functional precinct there before climbing the steps to the seating and terraces (Edensor and Millington, 2010). By contrast, in the external precinct around the Etihad Stadium, the pre-match atmosphere, originally muted and low-key, has had to be developed through the installation of interactive attractions and events to encourage fans to linger after and before a match to drink, eat, spectate, converse and play. For many, these enticements have now been enfolded into pre-match rituals, habitual practices and events that have ameliorated the original feelings of disorientation and placelessness; they contribute to the generation of homeliness and a more intense match-day atmosphere.

These interactive elements include the provision of food and drink and commercial sites, but also playful elements, new events and forms of entertainment. An increasing array of informal badge and scarf sellers, fanzine peddlers and ticket touts line the immediate approach to the stadium, and all around the precinct are a range of vans offering a variety of fast food, cabins selling official club merchandise, and programme kiosks. Most importantly is the large City Store, with its extensive range of clothing and other commodities.

Surrounding the City Store is City Square, the major point of congregation, a fan zone that includes the Summerbee Bar, named after a renowned former winger, where hundreds crowd to purchase pre and post-match drinks (Millington et al., 2021). Also included is the stage, a venue for pre and post-match discussion with former players, celebrity guests and pundits. Each match day, local musical acts perform before the game and interactive games and competitions are staged (see Fig. 7). John Doyle, project director of BDP who designed the area, explicitly



Fig. 7. Band playing in front of Colin Bell panel.



Fig. 8. The blue carpet experience.

states that 'City Square is all about extending the pre-match build-up and excitement outside of the stadium and onto the surrounding concourse to bring fans together' (West, 2010). A similar intensification of anticipation inheres in the nearby 'Blue Carpet Experience' at which around 90 min before kick-off, the arrival of the players is marked by announcements, the distribution of free items and loud music (see Fig. 8).

Other interactive features devised to foster a homely sense of place include gazebos under which buskers entertain the waiting crowds. Several attractions encourage fans to take photographs that may be shared on social media, extending match day memories and experiences to a wider, virtual community of City fans, thereby 'stretching' the notion of home (Baker, 2021). These include a large three-dimensional, blue sign reading 'Manchester', around which fans pose; City staff, referred to by the club as 'playmakers', encourage fans to hold onto a frame bordered by players and the injunction 'Come on City!' so that they can have their image captured (see Fig. 9). Photographs are



Fig. 9. Frame for photo opportunity.

similarly taken inside a small cabin in which fans are invited to sit beside a life-size cardboard cut-out of current City manager, Pep Guardiola, and hold up a shirt with the legend, 'New signing'. Finally, a small five-a-side pitch has been installed to encourage younger fans to complete in an informal game and a tennis table lures others to play a pre-match game.

Finally, a striking design that marks home identity on the precinct is the wide pedestrian path that leads from a large car park; it is entirely painted in blue, intensifying the sense of anticipation of a match day walk towards the stadium (see Fig. 10). In suffusing the gaze of walking fans and visually chiming with numerous other blue motifs, including stadium seats, club shirts and fans' scarves, the use of club colours can create a sense of emotion and community within the Etihad's environs (Schäfer and Roose, 2010): there is no doubt that we are now in the 'blue half' of Manchester (Xu, 2019).

5. Conclusions

This paper explores the temporal, spatial, and emotional processes through which a football ground becomes homely to the supporters who regularly congregate there on match days. We focus upon how Manchester City Football Club's former stadium, Maine Road, was at the centre of a rich social, sensory and affective world that was repeatedly experienced by fans in ways that cultivated a sense of homeliness. The routines, routes, fixtures, meeting points, places of consumption, textures, sensations and rituals of the stadium environs consolidated this extended sense of home (Edensor and Millington, 2010). By contrast, the Etihad Stadium to which the club moved in 2003, possesses highly regulated, serial and homogeneous surroundings, which initially generated unhomely feelings of disorientation and 'placelessness' (Relph, 1976). This culminated in fan anxieties about the lack of a fervent atmosphere on match days and a widely shared sense of detachment (Edensor, 2015; Steadman et al., 2021). The paper subsequently outlines the placemaking activities designed to solicit greater feelings of homeliness, namely through designing features that evoke nostalgia and heritage, the celebration of fan cultures, and the installation of interactive elements that encourage fans to linger in the stadium precinct before and after matches.

While these efforts have bestowed a measure of place identity on a somewhat sterile space, the generation of a deeper, more extensive sense of home is difficult to sustain given the qualities of the surroundings beyond the stadium itself. In contradistinction to the rich social and spatial environment within which Maine Road was embedded, in which many fans spent considerable time in shops, pubs and cafes before and after matches, similar facilities at the Etihad are largely absent. Whilst some fans linger after matches, most swiftly journey away from the stadium, moving through spaces of transit until they reach home or



Fig. 10. Blue path to Etihad stadium.

spaces where they socialise and consume. Fortunately, unlike other relocations where clubs have moved to sites well beyond former locales, to urban edges or along motorways, the Etihad is close to a city centre. While the thick textures of place and the potent atmospheres associated with Maine Road may be impossible to replicate in the environs surrounding the Etihad, pre- and post-match rituals now focus upon the city centre, giving a boost to pubs and restaurants there. While the surroundings of their former stadium have lapsed into residential calm, this redistribution of people, activity and spend on match days has re-energised city centre streets. Regeneration projects invariably produce winners and losers; formerly popular retail centres are sidelined as more fashionable consumption spaces emerge. Similarly, the relocation of City's home ground has produced new spaces in which fans may congregate and socialise (Richards et al., 2022).

Around the Etihad stadium itself, while attempts to produce a sense of homeliness are of only temporary duration, and the site remains an island of detachment outside match days, it has nonetheless enhanced the match day experience for many fans. We have emphasised that club managers and marketers are highly conscious that in the case of football, placemaking has to be an alliance with fans. The key dimensions of homeliness that designers have sought to privilege - nostalgia, the importance of memories and historical continuities, the celebration of fan cultures and the foregrounding of interactive engagement - must chime with supporters' desires and expectations. Moreover, the evolution of cultural practices and expressions in the stadium testifies to the critical role of fans themselves in a generating a sense of homeliness (Brown, 2010; Penny and Redhead, 2009). While older fans might still miss the rich social, spatial and sensory experiences and the numerous idiosyncrasies of Maine Road (Steadman et al., 2021), new generations of supporters have little embodied connection with a vanished site. For nearly 20 years, fans have become habituated to the Etihad, which has itself become a venue shaped by routine travels towards and away from the stadium. On match days, year-on-year, fans re-inscribe similar affective practices across stadium space and are repeatedly drawn into affects and emotions oriented around communal belonging. The ever-unfolding compendia of high and lows highlights how match day experience and atmosphere can never be solely designed but is a co-production in which fans cannot be construed as passive (Edensor, 2015). Perhaps most critically, a sense of homely belonging has been accelerated by memories of the team's unprecedented recent success, in which a catalogue of dramatic victories, transcendent football, superstar players and trophy-laden triumphs have eclipsed anything witnessed at Maine Road. Indeed, Manchester City's recent triumph in season 2022–23 in achieving the 'treble', winning the Premier League, FA Cup and Champions League, poses new challenges to the retention of plausible notions of heritage, homeliness and fan connection. Plans for stadium expansion and fan provision are already well advanced. As the club progressively becomes a global business concern and attracts an increasingly international fan base, maintaining a Mancunian identity and a connection to local fans on match days will require further careful investment in design, and fan collaboration and consultation to foster a homely, atmospheric match day experience.

We also emphasise that the processes we discuss in the specific context of football stadia are occurring more broadly as regeneration and redevelopment schemes are erasing formerly homely spaces in favour of serial, single purpose and functional spaces. Such contemporary developments are perhaps exemplified by concerns that global processes are erasing a sense of place (Strydom et al., 2018). Yet processes of producing homeliness are far from static, and a host of practices 'continuously load new meanings onto it' (Liu, 2014: 22), underlining how a sense of home and homely atmospheres are cultivated in spaces that extend well beyond the domestic sphere. Ratnam (2018) observes how feeling at home involves forging familiar connections between people, objects and other non-humans in diverse, differently scaled contexts. Our paper suggests that home is best understood as a relational, diffuse and extended concept, where a sense of homeliness

extends beyond a single enclosed site. Home is instead generated through people's emotional, embodied and affective practices taking place in, through and across surrounding spaces; in the case discussed here, the stadium perimeter, walking and transit routes to the stadium, points of intersection and meeting, and the broader spaces of the city.

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