Article

Watching the Watchers: A Visual Sociology Essay on Control, Security and Surveillance at Olympic Women's Soccer in Glasgow

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Abstract

This paper presents an essay based on photographs, grounded in visual sociology, which documents and discusses the security arrangements in place for the first day of Women's Olympic Soccer at Hampden Park in Glasgow, Scotland. Drawing on images of security arrangements, it considers how control of spectator behaviour, security and surveillance was laminated onto typical practices associated with football matches, but augmented because of the association with the Olympic Games.

Introduction

Security is an ever-present concern for sports mega events such as the FIFA World Cup and the Olympic Games. Numerous authors detail the increasing prevalence and cost of Olympic security since the Black Sunday attack on Munich in 1972, with the events of September 11, 2001 (9/11) causing a major spiral in security spending for subsequent games (Mastrogiannakis and Dorville 2013: 133; Toohey and Taylor 2008: 458-462). The spending on security for the London Olympics ended up in the range of US\$1.7 billion dollars (Giulianotti and Klauser 2011: 3157).

Concomitant with the increase in security concerns and costs, the academic literature on surveillance, security and sports mega events (hereafter SMEs) has greatly developed in recent years. Several authors examine how security spreads beyond venues, and causes ongoing security legacies (see e.g. Boyle and Haggerty 2009: 265-267; Lindsay 2013: 229-233). However, most of the literature offers more theoretical analyses, or quite appropriately deals with security and surveillance around the main SME venues and sites.

This paper presents an essay written around photographs, grounded in visual sociology, which documents and discusses the security arrangements in place for the first day of Women's Olympic Soccer at Hampden Park in Glasgow. Drawing on the work of Coaffee, Fussey and Moore (2011), which considers the way that venues become standardized and sanitized security spaces, and the repeated work of Taylor and Toohey on security and spectator experience (Taylor and Toohey 2006, 2007, 2011; Toohey and Taylor 2008; Toohey, Taylor and Lee 2003), this paper looks at how issues related to security and surveillance play out in a more peripheral Olympic site.

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The men's and women's football tournaments for the 2012 Olympic Games were the only events to be held at multiple locations outside of greater London, with games played in Newcastle, Cardiff, Coventry, Manchester, and Glasgow, and the finals at Wembley. These tournaments started two days before the opening ceremonies, commencing on July 25, 2012. In Glasgow, the games occurred at Hampden Park, the Scottish national football stadium.¹

The policies of the International Olympic Committee make it clear that the primary responsibility to ensure a safe environment for competitors, officials and dignitaries, while ensuring that any security measures remain fairly unobtrusive, remains with the host cities (Coaffee and Fussey 2011: 167). The London Olympic Games are the most recent in a long line of Olympic Games with spiralling security costs. They have been called 'the Security Games' in some circles, because of the cost and the intensive measures put in place, partly in response to the bombings in London of 7 July, 2005, the day after London was announced as the host city (Coaffee and Fussey 2011: 173-175).

Terrorism has become *the* major security concern with SMEs and other large public events. While there is major terrorism rhetoric in the media (Atkinson and Young 2002: 55), SMEs remain attractive targets for terrorists seeking attention (Toohey and Taylor 2006: 78). Operating under the precautionary principle, security planners try to prepare for even the remotest of possibilities, independent of probability estimates (Boyle and Haggerty 2009: 260-261). Coaffee, Fussey and Moore (2011: 3313) noted that in the city of London, security concerns could be 'laminated onto' the existing counter-terrorism structures in a city that has experienced decades of terrorism planning. Meanwhile, more mundane aspects of security must also be considered, including crowd control and regular policing. In 2012, Glasgow only hosted Olympic football. As such, security concerns appear to have been more so laminated onto traditional football policing and surveillance methods (even though the Glasgow airport was the site of an attempted car bombing in 2007). At the same time, security in and around the Glasgow Olympic site was visibly augmented with standardized Olympic security procedures and greater intensity in a number of ways.

Photographs and Visual Sociology

My family and I attended the opening game of the women's tournament at Hampden Park between France and the United States on July 25, 2012. This essay is based on photographs of various aspects of crowd control, security and surveillance that I took while going to and from the game, and inside the venue itself, as a form of data collection and ethnographic immersion. This approach draws on visual sociology, which has been around in various forms since the 1960s.

As John Grady puts simply in his topical overview, '(v)isual sociology employs images and other visual displays to analyze society and culture'. He further explains that it reflects two longstanding intellectual preoccupations with the visual—the idea of using visual methods for research into human social interactions, and a concern for interpreting the visual representations of cultures (Grady 2007: 63). Douglas Harper, one of the key authors in visual sociology, stresses the links to cultural studies work of those who analyze pre-existing images, while he draws links to anthropology (with its own longstanding traditions and debates over ethnographic film and photography) involving those who create their own images in their fieldwork (Harper 1998: 24).²

There are numerous arguments made for bringing photography or video recording into ethnographic fieldwork. One is that it aids the researcher in recall by allowing the production of detailed records of

¹ For information on 2012 Olympic Football, see the FIFA websites:

<http://www.fifa.com/womensolympic/index.html> and <http://www.fifa.com/mensolympic/index.html>.

² For an overview of the historical trajectory of visual sociology and key works in the area, see Wagner (2002: 160-170).

complex and fleeting phenomenon (Pauwels 2000: 9). Images can help strengthen ethnographic research by freezing moments of perception (Grady 2007: 65), which the researcher can then use in writing field notes and, later, communicating research findings. By capturing a wider frame than is possible with the naked eye, visual methods may even allow researchers to see things they might have missed in their own observations (Canal 2004: 35; Harper 2012: 84).

Beyond the implications as part of a bigger ethnographic project, Harper (2012: 4) suggests that visual research can produce new and different types of knowledge. He asserts that the world that is seen and represented visually is different to the world that is represented through words and numbers, and as a result, it connects to different realities than more conventional research methods. It also offers the potential for communicating research findings more directly and vitally than the typical ethnographic narrative.

My original intention in taking photographs was to show them to my students in my Olympic Studies course. I planned on capturing some of the pageantry and the security aspects of the Olympic Games. Even as I was taking the images, I became much less concerned with the pageantry, and much more with the security. Using visual methods requires ongoing interpretation, even as one is observing a phenomenon (Harper 2012: 75). I was really struck by how much security there was, and felt this needed further analysis. As Pink (2007: 12-13, 41) discusses, like many moments in ethnography, uses of the visual can be serendipitous; unanticipated uses of the visual may sometimes be discovered by accident and retrospectively defined as visual research methods.

I took a total of 65 images during the day of fieldwork, and upon analysis and consideration, coded 40 of these images as related to surveillance, security, or the control of spectator behaviours. These I subjected to a further reading, looking for general thematic consistencies and developing a deeper understanding of what it meant to be under surveillance as a spectator on that day, comparing back to my field notes written at the end of the day. I selected a sub-set of 14 images for this essay that collectively represent the variety of security and surveillance measures, organized in a chronological sequence over the day. These images are presented as I shot them; when images are focused more narrowly than others, I took them using the zoom function on the 12 megapixel digital camera that I employed. The only modification is some blurring of faces in the background of images 8 and 10, undertaken at the recommendation of the journal's editors for privacy considerations.

Recognizing the limitations and legitimate criticisms that can be leveraged against such an approach (Harper 1998: 30-33; Pink 2007: 120), I am operating primarily in the empirical tradition of visual sociology, where I am offering these as 'realist' pictures. Realist representations suggest 'here's what I saw' in a particular photographic moment (Pink 2007: 150). There are truth claims in such an approach, but it must be recognized that any truth claims in research are partial and situated (Harper 2012: 110). Photos are both true, in showing some version of reality, and constructed, through choices made in their composition and arrangement.

For example, in Figure 3 below, I purposively included a telephone pole in my photo of an overhead helicopter to bring the context of it being over George Square into the frame. Thus, there is the reality of helicopter surveillance, but a choice made in the composition of the photograph as to what to include of the environment. Having raised this issue, it is important to note that other forms of representing ethnographic research findings, including the traditional approach of writing-up field notes into academic articles and books, are also truth claims with similar problems that are no tidier than photographs (Wagner 2002: 170).

In supporting a realist approach to visual sociology, Harper contends that, assuming non-manipulation, photos show what they are asked to, editorialized by all the choices that lay behind the creation of the

image. Visual anthropologist Sarah Pink soundly criticizes visual sociology's tendency towards realism as not reflexive enough, but even she agrees that:

photographs and video may be treated as realist representations of the reality of the fieldwork context as ethnographers understand them...but they are always representations of the subjective standpoints of the image producer and other viewers.

(2007: 140)

Of course, I have composed the photographs initially, selected from among a collection to construct an essay, and included captions and comments, all of which puts my own interpretation on the situations being represented. As Howard Becker discusses (1998: 88-89), one needs to show how using photographs furthers the sociological enterprise by layering contexts and academic references. Accordingly, the essay moves back and forth between discussion of the images and the experience, and the academic literature on security, surveillance and behavioural control at SMEs. This adds another interpretive layer on top of that coming from the fieldwork.

In looking at the photographs, I would encourage readers to 'read' the photographs themselves first, without the captions and the surrounding text. Undoubtedly there will be things that readers see which I did not, and they will create their own interpretations and meanings. The spaces in between these interpretations may offer the richest material for a reader's consideration.

George Square—Early Morning Encounters with Control

The day started, as many had on our two week trip to Scotland, with a visit to George Square, the central downtown square in Glasgow. With Glasgow as an Olympic site, George Square had been 'gifted' with a large set of metal Olympic rings. As the first two images show, just about anything Olympic-related comes with rules about conduct and behaviour, which is not always followed.

Figure 1: Attempts to control behaviour...

Figure 2: ...and their failure.

Like my children (repeatedly), just about every person who went to take pictures with the rings climbed up inside, and visible wear on the bottom two rings could be seen close up. The prohibition against climbing in or on the Olympic rings was likely a simple matter of disclaiming legal liability, but it did reference ‘damage to the rings’. While this can be seen as a petty complaint, it indicates that most things Olympic are protected in some way, and come with behavioural constraints.

While we waited to go to the busses that would take us to the stadium, a helicopter passed over George Square several times. None of us could recall seeing any helicopters in the 10 days we had previously spent in Glasgow, so this was clearly related to Olympic soccer and the monitoring of crowds. As Giulianotti (2011: 3301) noted, helicopters are sometimes used in the UK with monitoring football crowds. This was likely a standard part of Olympic security planning (Coaffee, Fussey and Moore 2011: 3312), but it really represented a stretching out of the ‘spaces of securitization’ (Taylor and Toohey 2011: 3272), where wide areas of the whole city, rather than just the venue itself, come under surveillance. The same helicopter later flew over and around the stadium multiple times during the game, and appeared in my bigger collection of images in several instances.

Figure 3. Helicopter Flyover at George Square.

On the Way and Outside Hampden Park—Informal Oversight

Like in London itself, an Olympic Games ticket entitled the bearer to use public transportation for free. In Glasgow, dozens of coaches were hired to transport spectators from the downtown bus depot. With great efficiency, these busses took people from downtown out to the national stadium, and later picked them up and dropped them back.

Figure 4: *Arrival.*

Such arrangements offer convenience to spectators, and arguably, an enhanced experience. At the same time, they also allow for control and monitoring of the crowd. While the coach driver did not check our tickets, the idea that one used a ticket for transport meant that only ticket-holders could get to the stadium. It also ensured that the crowd comes piecemeal upon the coaches, rather than by themselves, risking a potential mass influx if allowed to come on their own. Even the most seemingly benign aspects of travel can link to security and control.

As can be seen in Figure 4, traffic flows were maintained quite close to the stadium. Rather than an approach where large swathes of the surrounding areas were cordoned off and controlled (Coaffee and Murakami Wood 2006: 505), which colleagues tell me was the approach at the main Olympic Park in

London,³ a certain amount of normalcy was maintained around Hampden Park. The Tesco store located behind me as I took the photo was still open as per normal. This could be seen as matching the IOC's goal of security that, if not unobtrusive, is at least minimally disruptive.

Figure 5: *Police Presence.*

The centre of Figure 4 shows the first glimpses of a police presence, with a line of officers in yellow coats just visible, off in the distance by the stadium. In the immediate surroundings of the stadium, one could not help but be struck by the heavy police presence (see Figures 5 and 6). We arrived early, and much of this seemed to be fairly informal, with police officers standing around in small groups. Many of them did not seem to be really doing much and essentially ignored the crowd fairly early on. Their presence likely had multiple aims: there was a deterrent effect with so many police officers around; they were there to react to any problems that occurred; and they were there partly for show. Dating back to the Montreal Olympics in 1976, part of the standardized apparatus of Olympic security is a conspicuous security force (Coaffee and Fussey 2011: 169). They are there in part to be seen, and the use of highly fluorescent jackets and vests, although quite normal in the UK context, adds to that. Boyle and Haggerty argue that security is also a spectacle—security efforts ‘seek to reduce the prospect of untoward eventualities while also fostering a subjective sense of safety among the public’ (2009: 264). Visibility is a key part of this.

³ I would like to acknowledge colleagues Heather Dichter and Sarah Teetzel, both of whom have attended multiple events at more than one Olympic Games, for informative discussions on different security arrangements. Sarah also accompanied us to Hampden Park in Glasgow, and helped with ticket arrangements.

Figure 6: The 'Ring of Yellow'.

There were formal police cordons. Spectators initially had to walk through the group in Figure 5 and show tickets to be allowed to proceed. Space, and the way that spectators can move through it, was controlled and closed off by a 'ring of yellow'.

Rather than through technological means, Hampden Park's environment was set aside by conventional means, with lots of police bodies. One could only proceed to designated gates. The majority of the crowd that arrived on the coaches passed through the police cordons, and walked around to the far end of the stadium where they went through a more thorough security check to enter the stadium. They then walked inside the stadium to their assigned seats, many of them almost all the way back to the end at which they initially arrived.

Much of this can be seen as the typical policing and control of football crowds on game day (O'Neill 2005: 59-71). A police presence at domestic football in the UK is expected, and even desired by spectators who could be classified as 'carnival fans', those out for the enjoyment of the day and the surrounding social events (Pearson 2012: 113-117). Police officers maintaining order, giving direction, and escorting away fans would be highly normalized at UK football matches (Frosdick and Marsh 2005: 178-179; Pearson 2012: 117-122; Stott, Livingstone and Hoggett 2008: 267-269).

Figure 7: The Volunteer Phalanx.

Just as we arrived at the stadium, security volunteers finished their last briefing and moved out to their stations. While it might just be a matter of timing, it felt like a military column moving out and we were awash in a sea of yellow. Early on, there were far more volunteers than spectators in the stadium environs. This goes entirely against the idea that security must remain fairly unobtrusive for spectator comfort and enjoyment (Boyle and Haggerty 2009: 264). As the image attests, the volunteer security was highly visible, and for those less familiar, difficult to tell from actual police officers at first glance. The volunteer presence and police cordons matches with Coaffee and colleagues' (2011: 3320) description of 'island security' surrounding Olympic venues, where an area of a town around a venue becomes cut off and securitized through the use of fences, cameras and checkpoints. In Glasgow, rather than being a 'ring of steel' that created this island of security, it was a ring of volunteers and police in yellow coats. Still, as Coaffee and Murakami Wood (2006: 505) indicate, such 'hermetically sealed' spaces offer those inside a sense of safety and territorial definition within this visible representation of high security.

Figure 8: Security Checkpoint and Street Performers.

On the right hand side of Figure 8, the security checkpoint for entering the stadium can be seen. Volunteer security and police were visibly intermingled with the crowd watching street performers outside. To the right of the man on stilts a volunteer can be seen holding clear plastic bags. These were used as part of the security check, where everything on the spectator's person was turned out and searched, while systematically dropped into the bag, much akin to airport-style security clearance. London 2012 venues generally had a rule that no bags or backpacks could be brought into the premises. Glasgow security relaxed that rule, but still turned all the contents of bags out.

The police officer doing our check bantered in a friendly manner. That might be taken as individual or some national Scottish personality, but it was also intelligent management of the situation by an experienced police officer to help counter any angst and resistance to the search. Research and practical experience in good police practice with football indicates that the personable management of potentially volatile situations, rather than an authoritative approach, can help diffuse potential problems (Stott, Livingstone and Hoggett 2008: 269-270; O'Neill 2005: 69-71).

Figure 9: Typical Football Turnstile.

To enter the stadium, spectators passed through the ceiling-to-floor turnstile that only one person can fit through. This would be very normal for a British football fan, but highly unusual for spectators from outside of Europe. My 3 year old daughter hated it, and we almost could not get her to go through because it was so intimidating. The Canadian students I show these images to are fascinated by it, with one describing it as ‘looking like some kind of ancient torture device’. They find the turnstiles very different from their experience of professional sports stadia that usually have glass outside doors, lobbies and waist-high turnstiles inside the building (as well as restaurants and souvenir stores that encourage exorbitant consumption).

This speaks to cultural differences, and how aspects of the control of bodies and space can be normalized so as to fade into the background. These huge turnstiles are aimed at control of behaviours, in this case, of crowds of people. They are designed to minimize the chance of dangerous crowding, based on past issues of fans ‘running the gates’ and flooding into the stadium en masse. They also enable keeping count of the number of fans in the stadium, and in their original intentions, make sure everyone was a paying customer. But they are so normalized that people typically do not think of them as control mechanisms, and there is even a nostalgia about them where going through marks a passage from the ‘real world’ into the ‘fantasy realm of sport’ (Inglis 2004: 64-69).

Inside the Stadium—Surveillant Assemblages

Figure 10: *Control of Display Behaviours.*

Just before reaching our seating section (this being an all-seater stadium, designed to control admissions and discourage hooligans), we came across a table offering free face painting of flags for children. This was fun and exciting for the children, but subject to IOC rules that only the flags of the nations that were competing that night, or the host nation's Union Jack, could be displayed. Much to my chagrin (since my generation's version of Canadian nationalism has a lot of anti-Americanism in it), my children chose the American flag as the one they wanted. Discussion with colleagues who attended other Olympic events indicates that these restrictions on national displays were strongly enforced. This all links to Toohey and Taylor's extensive research on behavioural control, security and spectator experience. At various events they found that overzealous application of rules on fan behaviour, especially those banning informal and pleasurable spectator practices, can detract from the fan experience (Taylor and Toohey 2011: 3172; Toohey et al. 2003: 182). My own overarching impression of the game and the crowd was that there was much less 'carnavalesque' than I expected and it was all fairly subdued.

Meanwhile, there is the strong possibility that some of this was due to it being women's football in the UK, where there is still some bias versus the men's games (according to FIFA statistics, just over 18,000 people attended the first day of the women's tournament in Glasgow, while 37,000 attended the next day for the men; both were weekdays). It might also be that it was prior to the start of the Olympic Games themselves (a day ahead of the opening ceremonies), and the audience was not yet caught up in the spirit.

Figure 11: *The Crowd Watchers.*

The next image, taken from the end of the stadium as the first spectators arrived, shows the on-the-ground security in full effect. While there was almost no one yet in the stands, security was already surrounding the field and watching over the crowd. This is another aspect that would be very familiar to UK football audiences, but strange to someone from, for example, North America, because such security practices do not occur in that context. It would be highly unusual for security personnel to be that visible at field level in a North American stadium at any point before or during a game, and any personnel at ground level would likely only be near access points to the field or dressing rooms.⁴ These crowd watchers, seen in Figures 11 and 12 during the game, would likely be so normal to UK football fans as to fade into the background and essentially become unseen. This speaks to the power of images as a research tool enabling a focus on and analysis of taken-for-granted aspects of social life.

One aspect of surveillance that completely slipped into the background, even for me with my research intentions, was the inevitable closed circuit (CCTV) cameras which are ubiquitous in public spaces in the UK. Having lived in the UK previously for two years, and visited Scotland for two weeks prior to this match, the CCTV cameras faded almost completely out of my awareness because their presence was so routinized. It is telling that despite my research goals, I honestly never thought to go take an image of a CCTV camera as part of the data collection.

⁴ Any comments made about North American professional sports is based on the author's attendance at major league sports in a number of different cities/stadiums: NBA (National Basketball Association), 5 different venues; NHL (National Hockey League), 2; Major League baseball, 2; as well as 8 other venues for minor league baseball, professional lacrosse, or major junior hockey.

Figure 12: *Layers of crowd watching.*

Figure 12 shows the crowd being monitored during the game. As seen in the far side of the image, the watchers were not paying attention to the game, but sitting on stools and watching the crowd. A second layer of watching is occurring in the entrances to the stands. Those who served as stewards are also meant to be monitoring the crowd instead of the games. They were not just helping spectators find seats and hanging around outside in the concourse, like often happens in North American stadiums. They also stayed in the wide-open doorway, watching the crowd as well. In many football stadiums, stewards are expected to closely observe crowd behaviour, and are given special powers to eject spectators not meeting the club's codes and standards (O'Neill 2005: 175-180; Pearson 2012: 122-127). Their role would be different at an international match at the national stadium, but it is certain they were still involved in observing spectators. So, there was surveillance of the crowd by several groups of people as the game happened.

Giulianotti (2011: 3301) discusses how the many layers of surveillance in a stadium make it difficult to theorize exactly who and what is being watched, and who is watching, which also makes it difficult to find a useful theory of surveillance. There is possibly a 'double inversion' of the panopticon—we might assume an inversion of the normal panoptic gaze as the seemingly powerless many (fans) watch the few (the players). However, even fewer (security, CCTV operators, police) are watching the many. This becomes more synoptic, as there are many observers looking out for the presence and behaviours of a few potentially problematic people in a larger crowd. He also suggests the relevance of the concept of the oligopticon, where more fragmented and localized technologies see little, but deeply. Without meaning to

be ridiculously complex, I would suggest my own ‘watching of the watchers’, and drawing attention to them through photography, brings in yet another inversion.

Giulianotti (2011: 3301) makes the case that information from diverse oligopticons come together as ‘surveillant assemblages’ meant to track the movement of fans in and around urban spaces. The idea of surveillant assemblages is that formerly discrete systems of surveillance coalesce together so that information about people is ultimately turned into ‘data doubles’ that can be scrutinized and targeted for intervention (Haggerty and Ericson 2000: 606). Within the stadium environment, and increasingly outside when one considers the potential tracking of electronic data, the different layers of surveillance come together in an assemblage that is far more powerful than any of the discrete systems alone.

In the case of Olympic soccer at Glasgow, a number of elements in the surveillant assemblage have already been identified—police cordons, overhead helicopters, security and volunteers on the field, CCTV cameras, and stewards in the stands. However, as the last two images show, there are yet more watchers inside the Olympic stadium.

Figure 13: *The hidden watchers.*

I took this long shot image of the end of the stadium, ostensibly to show my students the half-empty stands, wherein I could talk about gender biases and ticketing problems. As it turns out, I unwittingly captured my first image of yet another layer of surveillance. Most apparently, the image shows the watchers around the track, and a mass of security in the entrance from which the players would enter and

depart. But I want to draw readers' attention in particular to a small black dot atop the stadium lights on the right.

Midway through the second half, my seven year old daughter, who had become disenchanted with the game and the heat, began to look around the stadium. Soon, she asked, 'Daddy, who are the people on the lights?' I initially assumed she had an active imagination, but she pointed out exactly where she was talking about, the light I referenced above. Using the most extreme zoom on my camera (thus explaining the less than sharp image), I was able to obtain the following picture:

Figure 14: *Almost unseen observation.*

Having read several media reports in the preceding months about snipers and assault teams being assigned to guard Olympic venues in London (for example, Ingham 2012; Peck 2012), I suppose I should not have been surprised to see some sort of covert group in Hampden Park's rooftop. The media reports predisposed me to seeing this as a military tactical team. However, as one of the journal's reviewers pointed out, they could be police special operations, or more regular police spotters. Either way, it seems clear that they were meant to be watching without being seen. Their placement in a rooftop light is one indicator, as is the fact they are uniformed, but unlike all other security personnel, these people were not wearing fluorescent yellow to stand out.

Most people in attendance probably did not know they were there, and perhaps not knowing would be a good thing. I will not go so far as to say that realizing that such a security apparatus was in place ruined

my experience, but I will say that it made me nervous. I have some sympathy for those participants in surveys by Taylor and Toohey who suggested that too much security detracted from their experience.

The inclusion of such a covert and presumably highly trained layer of security really took this to an Olympic level beyond what you would expect to see at other types of sporting events. As described by Clavel (2013), there is an ongoing and increasing militarization and securitization of the Olympic Games, and other SMEs. This is part of the cost of Olympic security, and potentially leads to more militarization of the wider society as it becomes more normalized.

The many versions and layers of surveillance and security served to set Hampden Park and the surrounding area off as a temporary ‘sanitised Olympic space of exception’ (Coaffee, Fussey and Moore 2011: 3314). In using this term, Coaffee and colleagues are drawing on philosopher Giorgio Agamben’s (2005) work on ‘states of exception’ which broadly sought to criticize the way that governments use times of crisis (specifically, the post 9/11 time frame) as a means to increase their power and diminish individual rights. Agamben describes places where individual rights can be suspended (such as Guantanamo Bay) as ‘spaces of exception’. Coaffee, Fussey and Moore’s application of this to increasingly standardized Olympic security argues that spaces related to the Games get delineated by advanced technologies, separate modes of transport, metropolitan militarization, the use of extensive private security forces, and zero-tolerance models of policing (2011: 3314-3315). The varied parts of the surveillant assemblage at Hampden Park can be mapped onto the idea of Olympic spaces of exception, with the caveat that within such a space spectators’ movements and behaviours become highly regulated. While much of the surveillance and security apparatus in Glasgow was presumably temporary (large cadres of volunteer watchers and militarized covert observers, for example), it is possible that new norms and techniques of government may become instituted into the ongoing management of events and spaces (Coaffee et al. 2011: 3314), which may stay in place or resurface after the Olympic spectacle has left town.

Much of what has been discussed in this essay has already been given good airing in the wider academic literature on security, surveillance, and SMEs. What this essay primarily offers is a highly visible and readable example of the means through which security, surveillance, and spectators come together at a major football match. Beyond that however, it demonstrates that even geographically removed facilities involved with SMEs are brought into the orbit of their major security concerns.

Women’s football in Hampden Park in Glasgow serves as an interesting case in terms of security and surveillance at a sports mega event. Many of the aspects related to security and surveillance mentioned here would be typical at any large football event—a relatively strong police presence, coaches delivering out-of-town fans to the pitch, security personnel watching the spectators from the field level. Much of the security at the event could be considered as ‘laminated onto’ the ways that football is normally secured. At the same time, there was a collision with Olympic style/sized security demands. While a peripheral site in the grand scheme of the London 2012 Games, Glasgow showed many heightened security aspects that come with being part of the Olympic showcase—a mass of volunteer security, helicopters and covert observers. These disparate elements come together to provide webs of surveillance and control much greater than typically seen on a football pitch, and with all the watchers traditionally involved with football, maybe even beyond a typical Olympic venue. As sports mega events continue to grow in size and spectacle, and continue to move into the Global South as host sites, such surveillant assemblages may become less unusual, but even harder to disentangle and envision, theoretically or with a camera.

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