

Panoptic Features of the SAP Center San Jose

Despite how many names this indoor arena has shuffled through during my lifetime, I will forever call it the Shark Tank. I have spent hundreds of hours and dollars cheering on my local sports teams, favorite musical artists, Disney characters, and even pro wrestlers. Numerous times before, I never questioned the aspect of trained reactions of what I was doing, or why I was doing it. As I enter the SAP Center with a different purpose, I wander aimlessly, observing how the autonomy of guests assemble a connection towards a modern perception discovered in my course readings this semester. Spending time in this symbolic arena I will be able to convey panopticism within the SAP Center of San Jose by translating my findings and opening with my own interpretation of panopticism.

Panopticism is a theory explored by Michael Foucault in *Discipline & Punish* (1977). The third chapter explains panopticism by evaluating Jeremy Bentham's building and describing a large watchtower in the center triumphing the control of individualization. This centralized image of power is referred to as the Panopticon. The Panopticon was used as a basis for research and monitoring of the conscious internal surveillance and permanent visibility that assured the automatic functioning of power. "A physics of a relational and multiple power, which has its maximum intensity not in the person of the king, but in the bodies that can be individualized by these relations" (Foucault, 1977, p. 228). There was a tower, and the individuals knew they were being watched from the tower. The individuals could see the tower, but could not see when or where they were being watched. DeCerteau (1984) relates this representation with his description of "the solar eye" (p. 127). The principle is that power is not borne by a higher authority, but within individual bodies of a 'political anatomy' that make discipline and punishment more

economic, effective, and work in modern society. With this theory on the mind, the panoptic elements are exposed when walking into the SAP Center of San Jose.

Crowds of people line up between human placed handrails to permit SAP Center employees to search our jackets and bags. They say, “No open bottles, finish your drink” so we chug down the last of it. After successfully passing, there are more groups of people waiting for another employee to check tickets in. Guests make their way up the elevator, only to see clusters of other guests, police officers, security, and more employees. Walking in circles, trying to find the correct section, you pass countless individuals; guests, officers, security, and more employees. Foucault (1977) connects my observations by saying the following:

The gaze is alert everywhere: 'A considerable body of militia, commanded by good officers and men of substance', guards at the gates, at the town hall and in every quarter to ensure the prompt obedience of the people and the most absolute authority of the magistrates, 'as also to observe all disorder, theft and extortion'. (p. 195)

I saw this image while walking along the aisle openings with SAP Center employees appearing to be standing as guards. Everywhere you turn, there is someone with the SAP Center logo on their uniform. Finally, when the correct section is reached, there is another employee to greet and show us the way to the right seats, as well as making sure no one is stealing better seats with a possible better view. While enjoying the attraction that brought us to the SAP Center, it seems there are about four cameras scanning the crowds constantly with employees walking up and down the stairs while security is examining the rows of seats. Knowing how much surveillance was around made me feel more uncomfortable than I ever have while at this entertainment arena. Spending time in the SAP center only verified the conditioned functions of individuals throughout the building.

Now, I can conclude by linking the definition of panopticism and results from my observations of the SAP center. Articulating the way in which individuals line up, approve searches, and walk around with other fans along with rivals communicates the underlying social contracts we subliminally follow. Without being told what to do, or why we need to do it, we still follow the arrows, lines, rails, etc. Goh (2011) made the point of characterizing reinforced traditions as “depersonalized and dehumanized” (p. 203). There might be one or two in the crowd who decide to resist discipline by cutting in lines, or even passing the restricted railings to get on stage. We know that there are authority figures watching the crowds, uncertain if they are directly watching us or not. The internal awareness of surveillance amongst modern society allows us to act accordingly. Acknowledging the subjective theory of panopticism, one can wonder in everyday instinctual actions, why did I allow that?