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Congregations and the Nomads: An Exploration of the Words, Deeds and Journeys of Football Fandom

Gary Armstrong* and Hans Kristian Hognestad**

Abstract. Football support is enacted in local cultural contexts encompassed with transnational possibilities. Such support offers arenas for playing with identity and the chance to validate a host of social relations. In what follows analysis attempts to explain the journeys of two Norwegian brothers whose excursions to England to visit as many football grounds as they could required time, funding, motivation and planning. The inquisitive academics who sometimes accompanied them on such sojourns sought a rationale for such movement; what was the motivation? And what inspired the expending of such time and energies? Aware of commentators of the global game often speaking about football support as being akin to a “religion” for its devoted followers, the potential of quasi-religious analysis being applied to football support is a feasible route of inquiry. However, the two brothers that this analysis focuses on did not theorise their pursuit. They acted on their mutual enthusiasm, not without forethought and reflection, but did not feel any need to justify what they did. Their journeys carried the task of completing a collection, but one they set themselves and on a route that suited them. Such movement provoked considerations around notions of pilgrimage; but to what extent was anything sacred and to what potential revelation their journeys were carried out for was hard to realise. Essentially a study of trans-national (sporting) fascination the brothers’ journeys carried both the sense of the routine and the exceptional and were in essence a never-ending celebration of encounters that in some ways replicated that the brothers similarly enjoyed in their domestic sphere but in other ways was very different.

Keywords. Football (Soccer); Religion; Pilgrimage; Fandom; Football Grounds; Groundhopping; England; Norway; Leisure; Rituals; Public Houses (Pubs).

What follows focuses on two brothers – Kjell and Bjarte – natives of the Norwegian West Coast city of Bergen. Immersed in and acclaimed in the domestic football scene, the brothers were also footballing Anglophiles *par excellence* and between 1995 and 2015 were to visit England over 50 times “collecting” the grounds of the 92 football clubs that constituted the English Premier League and the English Football League. Their first trip saw them take in three games in four days. A decade later their trip was of four weeks duration in which time they visited 20 grounds. In May 2006 they could state they had visited and witnessed a competitive game at 59 English grounds and had drunk a beer in 330 English pubs (itemising each in a journal). Such practices were never theorized by the Brothers which forced the authors to ask whether there can be experiences without an (academic) narrative, and whether an understanding

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The research that follows was an inquiry conducted in various locations in Norway and England over the years 2001–13. The methodology adopted was participant-observation, involving the practice of what Barker et al would term “deep- hanging out”² with the research subjects both in Norway and England. Both authors are a product of Anthropological studies in England and Norway respectively and both successfully defended PhD’s that were studies of football fandom. The brothers’ story was not part of either author’s dissertation. The Norwegian co-author first met the brothers in Norway. He was to arrange for them to meet with the English co-author when they next visited England. Liaisons between the co-authors and the brothers took place a few times a year over the course of the next 12 years. The co-authors travelled to various games with the brothers and at other times sat with them in pubs both in Norway and England drinking beer and “talking football”. The research was thus never part of a research project but more an unintended outcome of doing what the co-authors enjoyed doing in their spare time and which had the added element of involving two individuals whose story was, we believe, worth telling. Unashamedly ethnographic the paper sought to locate their journeys within the academic paradigms of identity, trans-national journeying and the various practices of faith.³

1 Football Fandom: Theory and Practice

The popularity of football allows an observer to reflect on debates around local and global “socialities” in both imagined and virtual co-presences;⁴ and the death of distances⁵ as well as Durkheimian notions of the sacred (non-routine) and profane (ordinary) experiences.⁶ Embedded in the consideration is the tricky issue of defining “religion” and then deciding however it is defined if it might be applicable to explaining the brothers pursuits. A variety of scholars have attempted a definition of religion⁷ and if we were to stay with

1 Prebish, *Religion and Sport*.

2 Barker, Harms, and Lindquist, “Introduction.”

3 For clarity the authors will refer to the places a football match is played and where the brothers entered to watch the match as football *grounds*. The word “ground” was the term used by fans in most British contexts to describe where their team played. The term “stadium” in most instances came into wider usage around English football in the late 20th Century, with the proliferation of re-building football grounds in the aftermath of the Taylor Report of 1991 (see later).

4 Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*; Urry and Larsen, *The Tourist Gaze*.

5 Cairncross, *The Death of Distance*.

6 Durkheim, *Elementary forms*.

7 Cf. Tylor, *Primitive Culture*; Fromm, *Psychoanalysis and Religion*; Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigation*; Spiro, “Religion.”

a Durkheimian interpretation⁸ we might best consider the game of football and the supporter cultures it attracts and sustains as a set of beliefs and practices through which a society collectively worships an idealised form of itself. Proximity of other

believers is significant in all of this, for the collective enthusiasm and practises provide for a shared sense of tradition and collective excitement – what Durkheim called “effervescence” in momentary, ecstatic experiences, similar to that evidenced in charismatic religion.⁹

We – the authors – have no problem in accepting that various religious congregations provide for a crystallisation of shared emotions¹⁰ and have been recognised for the collective power they might harness.¹¹ Inevitably then the potential correlate that sporting congregations (and indeed sporting practices) offer to any debate on religion has attracted academic debate¹² provoking strident claims such as Chandler’s “sport is not a religion”¹³ to applying Bellah’s notions of civil religion¹⁴ or Bailey’s implicit religion.¹⁵ Some have argued how regeneration (one might also consider redemption) be it individual or social can be evident in sports spectating.¹⁶ Others note how sporting celebrations that embrace ancestry, heritage, and history offer in such themes a quasi-religious sense of the present and hope for the future. Considerations around sport as evidencing a sense of the sacred has informed the works of Ellis and Price¹⁷ and inspired Shilling and Mellor to speak of the “sporting sacred”¹⁸ which they see as compatible with the Durkheimian definition of the sacred ie as something “set part”. We can also include in our tour of sport-religion debates Demerarth’s ideas around secularisation processes¹⁹ and appreciate reflections around the narratives that gird the practises of sport²⁰ and apply the metaphor of the order of the canon.²¹ Other theological debates emerge from Fackre’s notion of God’s

8 Durkheim, *Elementary forms*.

9 Cf. Coakley, *Inside Sports*, 458.

10 Walter, “From Cathedral to Supermarket.”

11 Couldry, “The Geography of Celebrity;” Shils and Young, “Meaning of the Coronation.”

12 See Glock and Stark, “Dimensions of Religious Commitment;” Prebish, *Religion and Sport*; Eyre, “Sociological Reflexions;” Eyre, “Anfield Road,” 189–91.

13 Chandler, “Sport is not a Religion.”

14 Bellah, “Civil Religion.”

15 Bailey, “Implicit Religion;” see also Smith and Waller, “Surveying the landscapes.”

16 Alomes, “Tales of Dream Time.”

17 Ellis, “Sporting Space.”

18 Shilling and Mellor, “Re-Conceptualizing Sport.”

19 Demerarth, “Secularisation and Sacralisation;” see also Norris and Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular*.

20 See Serazio, “The Elementary Forms.” 21 See Rappaport. *Ritual of Religion*.

grace²² and what Tillich termed “dimensions of death”.²³ All such debates are informed by a variety of academic thought and methods.²⁴ There is no closure in such debate and in what follows we seek to add to the issues not resolve them.

If we accept that not all religious implications are based in scripture or the abstract, the brothers journeying has theological possibilities. The act of pilgrimage need not be confined to religious destinations. Sporting venues can hold a function analogous to religious institutions mediating experiences and offering opportunities for

transcendental experiences that can be variously; regenerative, communal, nurturing and charismatic.²⁵ This sense of pilgrimage might not to be considered a substitute for religious experience but a thing in itself. The potential for the application of dimensions of Durkheimian analysis in such journeys we feel needs consideration. Such journeys as will be evident offer all involved a chance to spend leisure time with others in a mutual enjoyment of collective sentiment in various senses of assembly.²⁶ The football match journeying has, at times, proscribed behaviours and thus we could argue the much celebrated noisy exaltations that define fandom and the ensuing *communitas* allows for the blurring of any distinction between self and others.²⁷ These occasions we argue offer also regular occasions for reflexivity and meta-communication²⁸ as well as providing for a series of acts of consumption.²⁹ Taken together these occasions are integral to the celebration of the totemic³⁰ which to follow Durkheim's argument would argue that the football team followed (god) is us (society) this devotion to what Durkheim called the *totem* is also a devotion to the *polis* and the collective that both constitutes the football club and surrounds it. Fans pay for an emotional experience with others in a social exchange that is both sought and bought providing for a collegiality that is shared – often with strangers – and whose “sheer excess” is integral to the event.³¹ The ensuing civic sense of collective emotion celebrates the shared symbolisms of the team and what one author has termed “the oneness of it all”.³² Such events are functional

22 Fackre, *Doctrine of Revelation*.

23 Tillich, *Theology of Culture*.

24 See Mandell, *Sport*; Elias and Dunning, *Quest for Excitement*; Magdalinski and Chandler, *With God on their Side*; Ferreri, “Sports and the American Sacred;” Feezell, *Sport*; Bain-Selbo, *Game Day*; Higgs and Braswell, *Unholy Alliance*; Overman, *Protestant Ethic*; Carter, “Anthropological interlocutions;” Hiebert, “Alternate forms;” Sheffield, “College Baseball;” Bain-Selbo and Sapp, *Understanding Sport*; Harvey, *Theology of Sport*; Harvey, “Christian Reflections.”

25 Ellis, *The Games People Play*, 178–79; Ellis, “Sporting Space.” 26 Wann, Melnick, Russell, and Pease, *Sport Fans*.

27 Durkheim, *Elementary forms*, 162–63.

28 Rowe, “Modern Sports.” 29 Sandvoss, *Football Fandom*, 17.

30 Durkheim, *Elementary forms*, 96.

31 Shils and Young, “Meaning of the Coronation,” 73–75, Crawford, *Consuming Sports*. 32 Cf Birrell, “Sport as Ritual;” see also Rappaport, *Ritual of Religion*.

satisfying the very human need for quasi-intimate relationship³³ and can be considered as practices of unity and integration existing in defiance of the anomie and dislocation that fascinated Durkheim's studies. Drawing further on Durkheimian thought the shared notions of fellowship and the passion around a common belief might be best considered as a non-material social fact.³⁴

Football whilst a celebrated secular practise is loaded with religious connotations. Like football, religion is encompassed in ritualized cultural constructs with performative elements that generate symbolic communication.³⁵ Since its late nineteenth century origin the game has immersed itself in notions of specialisation,

rationalisation and quantification, and at the same time carried beliefs in luck, fate and fortune. These can dominate its narratives, with many players at elite level invoking the Divine in pre-match prayer. Like a formal religious service the game requires a hierarchy of officials, a closed space of worship, an esoteric language and a temporal sequence played to a liturgical calendar and of course the human immersion of fellow-believers.³⁶ As a practice of sentiment however football is never fully articulated by any sense of the sacred or the hallowed.³⁷ Football carries no overt rituals that seek to protect from the pain of living; no offerings are sought to soften the anguish of removal from the contest. Unlike religious practise the football match does not celebrate order and reverence, nor does the game suggest answers to the most fundamental existential questions. The football faithful do not worry over doctrinal issues, which is significant because, as Berger would argue, “*in religion, not only are rule violations noticed, but the very rules themselves are constructed by entities other than human beings*”.³⁸ One thus might consider football as best theorised as manifesting a sense of a non-theistic religion with no central concern with a God or any sense of the superhuman. Regardless of what a reader accepts in such debates football is a global cultural practise that enchants beyond creed and culture. The game and the audiences it attracts might be considered to *function* in some ways. We might note also that any quasi-religious characteristics that football carries with it brings an assumed ability to foster social integration³⁹ a functionality Novak argued sectarian religion was no longer able to do.⁴⁰ And we can accept that the pursuit of encounters of immersion has to

33 Serazio, 2013.

34 Carey, *Communication as Culture*; Wakefield, *Team Sports Marketing*. 35 Bromberger, “Football.”

36 Armstrong, *The Case for God*.

37 Torrance, *The Spiritual Quest*.

38 Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 111.

39 Cf. Loy, McPherson, and Kenyon, *Sport*, 260.

40 Novak, *The Joy of Sports*. Watching (grid-iron) football, Novak argued, articulated a human spirit and “giving your heart to the rituals of sport, is very much like giving your heart to baptism or the Eucharist” (ibid., 42). The origins of sport *per se* might be considered via the concept of “folk religion” and carrying dimensions of the cultic. Cf. Marty, *The New Shape*; Linder, “Civil Religion;” Mathisen, “Twenty Years After Bellah.”

be the quintessential motivation behind the brothers’ journeys and indeed all football supporters. Is thus a sense of pilgrimage at large in our search for reason and motivation? Most religious traditions seek a link with the Divine through ritualised travel to shrines or places considered Holy. Reflection on the possible linkage with football followings is needed here; the essence of pilgrimage lies as much in the need to travel (i.e., the journeying) as to arrive (i.e., reaching the destination).⁴¹ Pilgrimage is undertaken to arrive at places considered sacred usually in fulfilment of a vow, or the seeking of penitence.⁴² Such journeys were typically characterised by fasting in an experience meant to be transformative in various ways. There is, we need note, latitude in our understanding of the notion of pilgrimage. The Latin word (*peregrinatio*) denotes an aspect of travel, while the Greek *proskynitis* (worshipper) does not apply itself to travel or a striving to reach a sacred centre, but describes

instead a temporary turning away from the vanities of everyday life and its associated sorrows and pleasures. How the brothers decided on their routes and places of significance needs exploring.

2 A Fascination with the Quintessentially English Game

The brothers' journeys to England were a product of both enabling technologies and that we can term variously "fateful moments", "turning point experiences" or "epiphanies" so crucial to constructs of self-identity.⁴³ The initial enthusiasm for two English clubs the brothers subsequently followed for two decades arose from quite random moments. Bjarte's following of Middlesbrough FC began in April 1974 when the latter played a pre-season friendly game in Bergen. Seeing an English club in the flesh for the first time saw Bjarte follow them henceforth. Kjell's following of Arsenal FC began in 1971, when the North London localboy-made-good, Charlie George, scored the winning goal for Arsenal in the FA Cup final and remained prostrate with his arms aloft in jubilation until hauled to his feet by team mates. The game was broadcast live on Norwegian TV. Both would include games at the grounds of their respective English clubs every time they visited England.

Whilst the two clubs followed were English, the brothers journeys exemplified the *glocal* experiences that contemporary elite level English football provides.⁴⁴ The stadiums the brothers visited on each journey – Arsenal's Emirates Stadium and Middlesbrough's BT Cellnet Riverside Stadium – had in their construction lost any quintessential "English" signature.⁴⁵ The former's Emirates Stadium, opened in July 2006, was located in the North London borough of Islington in a neighbourhood undergoing processes of gentrification and *embourgeoisement*. Named after a Middle East airline sponsor and capable of hosting 60,000

41 See Bailey, "Pilgrimage."

42 Cf. Davidson, Dunn, and Dunn-Wood, *Pilgrimage*.

43 Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*.

44 Cf. Giulianotti and Robertson, "Globalization of Football."

45 Church and Penny, "Power, Space and the New Stadium."

all-seated, the stadium had comfort levels previously unknown in English football.⁴⁶ This stadium replaced the club's 1913 Highbury home which stood a mere 0.5 km away and which had a maximum seated capacity of 38,500 and was iconic in being designed in part by Archibald Leitch, the architect of many English and Scottish grounds. Its art deco features and fabled "marble" (actually terrazzo) staircase from the main entrance to the Directors box had afforded the ground a Grade 2 Listed status. Its features were inspired by Scottish and Italian influences though for many of those who graced its pitch and boardroom the club and the place that hosted it were quintessentially "English".

The town of Middlesbrough – a three hour train journey north of the Emirates – held a very different demographic profile.⁴⁷ A bastion of the semi-skilled and unskilled white working class the town's Cellnet Riverside stadium opened in the summer of 1995. The stadium nomenclature similarly reflected the corporate domination of post-1990's elite level English football. Capable of holding 35,000

seated spectators the stadium was the first in the UK built to comply with the Taylor Report.⁴⁸ It could also – at the time – claim to be the largest newly built post-war football stadium in the UK. The club's former Ayresome Park ground was located in the middle of a working class residential area. The demographics in the vicinity of the two stadiums were not factors in the brothers' choice of club or subsequent journeying. For the brothers' the journeys to and the particular act of *entering* the ground was what mattered.

On top of this support for these two elite-level English clubs came support for two small clubs in the lower reaches of the English Football League. Icons of localism these football clubs and their football grounds had been used across the previous century and were located in proximity to their respective town centres. The brothers' support for these two clubs similarly arose from chance encounters. Hartlepool fans had visited Bergen in 1999 following their team in a pre-season friendly. There they met the brothers in a bar and a mutual enthusiasm for "talking football" led to e-mail-friendship which resulted in the brothers visiting the town. This was to become a regular destination in subsequent trips. The brother's following of Rotherham arose out of an e-mail sent to Bjarte in 1997 by a resident seeking information around a proposed visit to Bergen. In the course of selling the city, Bjarte introduced football into the dialogue. The initiator held an enthusiasm for Rotherham United FC and after many e-mail exchanges was

46 The stadium perimeter hosts a toilet for police dogs and dogs that assist the partially sighted.

47 Middlesbrough, "Local Statistics."

48 The Taylor Report was established to inquire into the cause of the April 1989 Hillsborough stadium disaster in which 97 fans of Liverpool died in a crush during an FA Cup semi-final fixture against Nottingham Forest. The Report published in 1990 recommended that all English football grounds, i.e., all clubs in the top two divisions of the English football league structure become all-seater by 1994. Terracing vanished from these grounds and many clubs in response to the Report demolished their grounds and up-graded or re-located.

to visit Bergen. The brothers returned the visit in 1998 and were to "adopt" the town and its football club.

The Hartlepool United and Rotherham United clubs are located in former industrial heartlands and averaged four-figure home attendances. Both towns had fallen on hard times since the mid-1980s and were high on national levels of unemployment and indices of poverty.⁴⁹ The steel and one-time coal producing South Yorkshire town of Rotherham (pop 110,000) had seen its one professional football club leave its long-time home of Millmoor in 2008 (after 100 years of hosting) relocating in 2012 to the nearby newly-built 12,000 seater New York stadium. Hartlepool's 8,000 capacity Sports Direct stadium (previously known – since 1908 – as Victoria Park) had served the club since its origin and was a central part of the 89,000 population in a town once renown for coal exporting and shipbuilding. There was nothing glamorous about these two clubs or indeed the towns they were part of but the brothers were not indulging in poverty tourism. They were individuals comfortable in many social settings and more importantly could engage with audiences from varied social class

backgrounds with their ability to “talk football”, i.e., engage with fellow enthusiasts on aspects pertinent to the game.

The brothers’ football support for English football clubs was thus a little complicated. We might best argue that Arsenal and Middlesbrough were alive in the minds because of the brothers daily participation on the clubs official web-site and unofficial fan web-sites. By contrast, Rotherham and Hartlepool were alive in what we might call “the actual”, i.e., visits to the towns and the grounds. In truth the brothers knew little about the latter clubs’ respective histories and players, but enjoyed their visits to the towns because of the people that befriended them. The commitment was also about adornment, for they often wore Arsenal and Middlesbrough shirts at games of the respective clubs, but did not wear Hartlepool or Rotherham shirts, preferring their SK Brann shirts (see later) at such matches. To borrow from Giulianotti’s taxonomy of fandom,⁵⁰ the brothers considered themselves as *supporters* (in fact super-supporters) of SK Brann, mere *fans* of Arsenal and Middlesbrough, *followers* of Rotherham and Hartlepool and football tourists – Giulianotti’s *flaneur* – when in a crowd of only 47 watching a game in the sixth tier of the English footballing pyramid which is what they did between fixtures of the aforementioned clubs.

The brothers clearly had a fascination with the English game, and in this were not alone amongst their co-patriots in this. English football has been covered by various Norwegian media since the 1902 founding of the Norwegian Football Association. This fascination with the progenitors of the game was enhanced in the late 1940’s with the introduction on the BBC Radio World Service of live commentary of English games (which Norwegians could listen to on Short Wave⁵¹) and later in 1969 with the introduction of live (one game a

49 GOV.UK, “Collection;” Rotherham Together Partnership, “Opportunity and equality;” Bhattacharya, “The policy wonk’s guide to Hartlepool.”

50 Giulianotti, “Supporters, Followers, Fans and Flaneurs.” 51 See Murphy, *BBC Sports Report*.

week) broadcasting of English games by Norwegian state TV which facilitated the collective and individual imagination. Though the playing tactics were the primary focus of TV spectating, the sounds of the football crowds evident in the broadcasts were amazing because they were so “un-Norwegian”. Passionate, frequently insulting, occasionally violent and often carnivalesque, the sight of the spectators on the TV screens not exercising the politeness that characterised the Norwegian domestic game and indeed society, fascinated the Norwegian viewer. The stadiums also offered an enchanting back-drop with their Victorian and Edwardian architectures and occasional legacies of Empire. The annual FA Cup final pageantry combined in pre-match spectacle of marching band militarism and the regal presence of the Royal family, providing an iconic, seductive otherness which struck a chord in the Norwegian male psyche. For such support at that times in Norway was a male “thing” and the brothers were not alone in their fascination and fandom.

Whilst the two nations were neighbours of a sort it was just one that held in its football clubs the potential for adopted identities in the other. Separated by the North Sea – a distance of some 1400 km and just two hours flying time – the aforementioned media transmitted passion for the English game inspired a Norwegian pursuit of

“Englishness”, via football support, was made relevant in the portable and imaginative “vernacular spaces” of the Norwegian school-yard, the work-place and in the pub space.⁵² Such narratives were then consummated by actual journeys to what we can consider to be the “sacred centre” of such support, i.e., the football grounds of the English clubs.⁵³ The norm for was (and remains) support for a Norwegian football club in parallel with that of an English club. That we can term “the narcissism of minor differences” had a role to play in the choice of the English club, be it the Monday school-yard, or in the work-place, the football debate was enlightened and enhanced by those whose chosen teams were not in the mainstream nor were one of the big clubs. Individuals with loyalties to those clubs long considered to be minnows and “also-ran” became by virtue of their footballing selection potentially that bit more interesting. Why the local Norwegian domestic scenario did not satisfy the football enthusiasts is a moot point. Perhaps the remoteness and homogeneity of Norway propelled some to travel south west to join the collective sentiment that the larger and volatile English football crowds provided.

3 Alcohol soaked celebrations of the beautiful game

The piety and sobriety that defined the state of Norway and its religious observations provoked occasions of rebellion. In the 1970s the city of Bergen was – like the rest of Norway – both conventional and “religious”. The latter most publically apparent in a Baptist-inspired abstinence from alcohol consumption. An absence of public houses throughout Norway at that time meant that domestic consumption of liquor

52 Zukin, “Postmodern Urban Landscapes.”

53 Cf. Turner and Turner, *Images and Pilgrimages*; Turner, *Process, Performance and Pilgrimage*.

was mainly through state-controlled off-licences which limited the quantities permitted to each citizen. As a political attempt to produce sober citizens however, this largely failed on a Saturday afternoon when English football-inspired, alcohol soaked celebration became the norm in groups of men aged from their late teens to their late twenties and the occasion for transgressions from the celebrated Norwegian cultures of politeness and sobriety.

In the 1970s and early 1980s, with parents away from the family home, the brothers, then in their teen years, took advantage of the absence to watch the state TV broadcast of English football and in the company of peers, enjoyed “ping” parties. The essential components were a TV screen broadcasting a live top-level English game and bottles of beer. Such occasions required watching two hours of a live broadcast of an English football game supplemented by an awareness of the scores of other games in the same League programme. The scenario was thus; should a team involved in another fixture off-screen score a goal, the commentary of the live match would be interrupted by a “ping” sound. This indicated that a goal had been scored-somewhere. Seconds later the information bar along the bottom of the TV screen revealed the match and the scorer. The duty of any Norwegian fan of the team that had scored was then to empty his beer bottle in one gulp. High scoring games, and poor timing in replenishing the bottle, could quickly lead to inebriation.

The broadcasting of English games the 1970's and 1980's was confined to the traditional Saturday 3 pm kick off time. Things changed in the early 1990's with the establishment of the English Premier League and global broadcasting deals which brought a broadcasting proliferation of live games – sometimes three a day and at times five days a week. At the same time came more liberal licensing laws in Norway. As a consequence, licensed premises (bars and pubs) sprang up, and Norwegians were able to watch live games in pub premises now open seven days a week.⁵⁴ So that now there was no need for the practices of “throwing beer down the throat” on a Saturday afternoon. Like their Norwegian counterparts however the brothers were hooked on the correlate of beer and football – wherever the game was taking place with anyone able to join in the practices of football support and beer drinking. The big issue was choosing which team to support and choosing which beer to drink. The practise was thus structured to a degree and once a football team was chosen an enthusiast was expected to remain loyal to it for life.

Joining the footballing party was easily done. Anti-structure is the essence of football support⁵⁵ with enthusiasts having little to “learn”, bar the rules of the game and the club histories, which is information easily gained through the clubs' publications, and from regular attendance in the company of fellow supporters. Essentially “autodidacts” with a self-agreed knowledge football fandom is an easy status to claim. Football identities are crucial aspects of self-identity and

54 Armstrong and Hognestad, “Hitting the Bar.” 55

Cf. Turner, *The Ritual Process*.

usually do not change in the course of a life.⁵⁶ Such an identity adds to the “basket of selves” and is celebrated in movements away from those considered routine.⁵⁷ Such identities need affirmation and journeying to the match was what epitomised the football following that the brothers did. This needs reflection because such journeys offer theological possibilities. Physical journeys of many sorts have been argued to satisfy a characteristic we might best consider as “basic wanderlust”.⁵⁸ Furthermore individuals travel in pursuit of answers to the question “who to be?”⁵⁹ We might consider whether, as a consequence of an increasingly pluralized life world, an individual may have a permanent identity crisis.⁶⁰ If so we ask further: might football-related journeys in some way address this crisis? And if so, in what way?

4 Groundhopping: “Collecting” the Sacred Centres

We might also remember that what the Brothers were immersing themselves in was not a particularly agreeable “English” culture. Defined as it was in the 1970's and 1980's by football hooliganism and dilapidated football grounds which culminated in the deaths best remembered as the Hillsborough Disaster,⁶¹ the Bradford City stadium fire,⁶² and the Heysel Stadium disaster in Brussels,⁶³ English football carried an unwanted global notoriety albeit the body politic would not die. Pursuing a post-1990's sense of rehabilitation the football authorities and club boardrooms sought out new audiences and thus implicitly pursued new avenues of income. The obvious source here were broadcasters and commercial sponsors. The net result was the 1992

breakaway from the FA of the then 22 elite English Premier League clubs with a financial deal negotiated between the clubs and satellite TV, which made money that the clubs had previously only dreamed of. With TV rights sold, globally, the football-broadcasting-sponsorship nexus went on to sustain the English Premier League as the richest football league in the world. Emblematic of free-market globalisation, defined by egoism, rapacity and greed⁶⁴ the game at an elite level manifest what we might best term *casino capitalism* in pursuit of footballing success.⁶⁵ In this pursuit the status of “Super club” saw many in the English Premier League become

56 Schlesinger, *Media, State and Nations*, 173.

57 Cohen, *Self Consciousness*, 11.

58 Cf. Lifton, *The Protean Self*; MacIntyre, *After Virtue*; Netton, *Seek Knowledge*, 121.

59 Cf. Berger, Berger, and Kellner, *The Homeless Mind*, 78; Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 75; Nikolaisen, “Embedded Motion.” 60 Cf. Dubisch, “Heartlands of America,” 125.

61 Anonymous, “Hillsborough disaster;” cf. McDougall, “Deconstructing the Myths.”

62 Anonymous, “Bradford City stadium fire.”

63 Anonymous, “Heysel stadium disaster;” cf. Kech, “Heysel.” 64 Bower, *Broken Dreams*; Cowley, *The Last Game*.

65 Conn, *The Football Business*; Conn, *The Beautiful Game?*; Banks, *Going Down*;

Dempsey and Reilly, *Big Money*; Morrow, *The People’s Game*; Bower, *Broken Dreams*. investment vehicles and trophy possession for billionaires, oligarchs and nation states.

The English game was in the eyes of some resurrected from its death bed. The elite clubs became akin to global corporate brands performing in newly built grounds (now referred to as “stadiums”) that might well fit the definition of *non-places*.⁶⁶ The concomitant *embourgeoisement* of the English Premier League fan base and the accompanying “Americanisation”, in terms of spectator comfort and safety, attracted (in part) a new audience and the promotion of what the clubs now termed a “match day experience”. Accompanying such changes was an internationalisation of the English Premier League playing personnel, club managers and clubs boards of directors. Two decades into the new Millennium half of the 20 clubs of the English Premier League were owned by foreign interests with some teams starting their fixtures with no English-born players. At English Premier League level the game we might argue has followed the prediction of Huizinga who foresaw modern sport as becoming obsessed with commerce and science, in a “desacralised sterile activity”⁶⁷ in which players and spectators would become unconnected by any socio-cultural processes. Interestingly clubs in the English lower divisions were largely untouched by such processes. Most survived, despite at times severe financial struggles, a survival epitomising the depth and tenaciousness of the wider football geography into which the brothers had delved.

Having followed English clubs and visited English grounds before the establishment of the English Premier League the brothers believed they were part of the authentic English supporter culture. They admitted they had no resistance manoeuvres to the changes in the English game that in time would see (at elite level) the transnational supporter as the largest and most lucrative fan category in the English Premier League clubs marketing strategies. One might argue that the vast

majority of Norwegians journeying in recent years to watch English football never experienced the earlier socio-cultural processes of indigenous fandom and so their journeys might best be appreciated as those of well-wishers to the English game seeking of some kind of connectedness. The brothers knew that their connection was deeper but did not pontificate on the issue. This forced us ask further: What is it that is being collected, and what is the motivation for the pursuit of such connectivity? Added to these questions was the more logical one as to how such journeying happened and what personal and philosophical criteria were at large.

The brothers always had an itinerary for their journey and, in a sense, a structure but there was no script to explain or justify what they did. Their criteria for what constituted a “collected” football ground required they watch

66 Augé, *Non-Places*. Essentially a place of transience, a *non-place* in Augé’s argument, was a place that carried little sense of significance if one considered the notion in anthropological terms. A place ideally carried some historical context. A *non-place* was sporadically occupied by people in a bureaucratic manner devoid of any sense of society.

67 Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 139.

a competitive match, i.e., one designated and regulated by the Football Association for at least 45 minutes of the scheduled 90-minutes. This illustrated what they termed “respect” for such an occasion. Having achieved their mission, they never boasted of doing so. The issue was private, there was no material, financial or intellectual gain involved in such journeying. Football ground “collector” enthusiasts exist across Western Europe.⁶⁸ Such “ground-hopping” (as it is known amongst its exponents) is better known in England as the *92 Club*.⁶⁹ There are no founding legends, nor “proper” ways of completing the collection.

Some would argue that public transport was the “correct” way as opposed to the luxury afforded by car ownership. Some sought to complete the collection in the shortest possible time. Some liked to add complexities such as only watching a game under floodlights, i.e. evening games only. Some cycled the respective journeys. The brothers were not part of the *92 Club* and would explain to the curious that they were not competing with anybody, nor did they seek celebrity or validation from anyone for what they were doing. So what motivated them to do it?

Personality and familial status played no small part. Aged 50 and 54 in 2015 and living in bought apartments, the brothers working class family home, on an island off of the West Coast city of Bergen (Norway’s second city hosting a population of 350,000) was not far from where they had chosen to live in their respective bought apartments. The brothers identified as heterosexual males who lived alone and self-identified as industrious and civic patriots who worked hard to earn the monies to follow their domestic and English football passions. Their pursuit was obviously connected to their teen years (see the “ping” parties earlier) but they could not blame their parents or indeed kinship for their football enthusiasms; their non-church attending Baptists parents were tee-total and disinterested in both domestic and English football. Of the six siblings, four had little interest in football. Neither brother was athletic or ever held footballing ambition.

The brothers were different in many respects. Having left formal education at the age of 16, Kjell had been employed for decades as a tool-maker and was well-known

as the factory trade union representative. Thoughtful and forthright in his conversations Kjell was a more brooding presence than his more effusive and “chatty” brother. Bjarte a taxi-driver was a personable and articulate figure which no doubt helped his interactions with up to 40 passengers a day. Social democratic in their politics, and humanitarian rather than dogmatic in their football-related activism, the Brothers were *uber*-citizens known by repute by most of the population of Bergen with a devotion begun in childhood to SK Brann the city’s most renowned professional football club. Different in physical

68 For Germany, see Herzog, “Fußballwallfahrten;” Herzog, “Religiöse Dimensionen.”

69 The latter entity, which calls itself a society, was founded in 1966, the year of England’s World Cup victory and numbered 1,100 members in 2009. In order to become a member a person must have attended an Association Football game at each of the 92 stadiums that constituted the English Premier League and English Football League. See: “The 92 Club: The most exclusive club in football;” “Groundhopper Soccer Guides: Your Gateway To The World Of Football.”

appearance – few would ever consider them brothers – they were self-confessed football fanatics but also ever-keen to act as informal civic ambassadors, stressing both the beauty of Bergen, and the flawed brilliance of the local SK Brann football club they followed.

They were thus not throwing off what they came from in their English journeys.

The SK Brann club was totemic to the city and integral to brothers’ identities. Founded in 1908 the SK Brann (the word means “fire”) club had acquired a late 20th century reputation as Norway’s second best supported team averaging crowds of 12,000–15,000 renowned in the Norwegian footballing world for their fanaticism. The club celebrated an iconographic relationship with the city – a one-time Hanseatic city-state – and, like the city, sustained a strained relationship to the concept of the nation-state and the political and economic capital city of Oslo.⁷⁰ This insularity in relation to fellow Norwegians was best exemplified in the Bergen citizens’ well-known mantra “We are from Bergen not Norway” when responding to the inquisitive foreigner when seeking their nationality. The SK Brann badges and team shirts that the brothers always wore on their English journeys was a quasi-missionary artefact, for such apparel was meant to provoke inquiry and in the ensuing discussion would invariably link the conversation to the city of Bergen – and implicitly to the football club. The brothers were thus seeking encounters of which they were part of the script, with the game and the football ground visit as a backdrop to the enjoyment of these random conversations with the football and non-football curious.

Their Norwegian life was routinised and defined by tranquillity and order. Terms such as “safe” and “monocultural” best defined a city famed for its incessant rainfall and startling natural beauty. The brothers were most at home in their domestic realm in the city centre *Fotballpuben* premises colonized daily by SK Brann fans which numbered up to 500 enthusiasts on match days.⁷¹ The brothers preferred drink in here was the locally – brewed *Hansa* beer,⁷² a name derived from the city’s Hanseatic heritage.⁷³ The brewery had sponsored SK Brann from the 1920s. Such localism was diluted somewhat by daily evening TV broadcasts of foreign football games in all of the premises four rooms, and the framed global football paraphernalia displayed on the walls. Domestic football support thus brought the brothers extensive local

friendship networks, and occasional exhaustion created by long journeys in support the team.

70 Cf. Armstrong and Hognestad, "Football and Civic Pride."

71 Whilst fans spoke of the pub as "theirs", the reality was they were there as guests. The pub was a commercial entity run by an entrepreneur who, since 1992 had themed the premise to attract the Brann clientele. The owner appreciated the regulars because of the volume of beer sold to them, and had established a reputation for selling the cheapest beer in the city center.

72 The symbiotic relationship between brewery and club was enhanced structurally when the all-seater Hansa-stand was erected at the stadium in 1998, creating the local inside the local.

73 Städtebund die Hanse, "The Hansa."

Rarely missing a SK Brann away game in 35 years the schedule for such a devotion at times required seven hours driving to a fixture. From the late 1980's the brothers had followed their team at times on catamaran excursions along the fjords and from 1999 took over the organising of such excursions. Such willingness to organise carried also a conscious pursuit of both responsibility and sociability. One fixture explains what was needed. The "local" Derby against Viking FC in the West Coast city of Stavanger (some 200 km from Bergen) required a three and a half hour each-way voyage. The "dead" (i.e., non-match hours) needed filling. This was helped by beer drinking on the vessel which continued on land. The brothers were entrepreneurial in striking a deal with a local bar ahead of their arrival, working on the assumption that a 10% reduction in beer price was a fair trade-off for the patronage of some 300 visitors. The SK Brann away following was always eclectic. School teachers travelled with younger men sporting the football hooligan "casual" style borrowed from the UK. Over 80% of travellers were male with some 5% aged between ten and 16, and three quarters between 18 and 40. On such water-born journeys the brothers would never consider themselves to be leaders – they merely facilitated. And if the social behaviour and attitudes of fellow travellers were not to their liking, there was little they could do, except attempt sweet reason on the perpetrators. For inclusivity was their ultimate aim, with "the more the merrier" ethos making for good times.

Their fellow-travellers were self-selecting; no criteria was required. The journey cost combined with admission costs and 10 hours drinking required those travelling to have funding of £100 minimum. When one considers there were 13 away league fixtures each season with possibly four trips in cup competitions then costs added up. Supporting SK Brann in places such as Tromsø, Bodø and Trondheim were required to budget for over-night accommodation. A conservative estimate in 2010 of their domestic away-support costs for the season came to around £2,700. The cost of excursions to England were often double the cost of such domestic journeys. The brothers freely admitted that what they did would not be possible if they had been in relationships, or were fathers. And so we need ask; what was it they were pursuing in England, and why?

5 Celebrating and Consuming Englishness: Taste and Sociality

The brothers pursued and celebrated what they considered to be “Englishness” which required spectating and consuming. They did this by visiting English football grounds and public houses (pubs) and talking to whoever they met. A football match at a ground constituted the 90-minute peak experience of their journeys. However, there were many other hours to fill in and this was done through experiencing ideas of “England” with notions of taste and the consumption. The accommodation they found in small bed and breakfast premises and rooms above pubs saw them insist, each morning, on a full English breakfast as part of the deal.⁷⁴ Historically such fayre was rarely offered in hotels in Norway where such a plate was considered to be a typical Sunday/holiday “slow” breakfast – in effect a “time off” treat.⁷⁵ Breakfast was thus a symbol of leisure time; the brothers were away from their daily routine and thus sampling something not considered “everyday” in their home environment. Such food was therefore perceived to be quintessentially “English” and added sensorially to the celebration of difference they were pursuing.

Beer was also part of the celebration of Englishness. During their early years of traversing the English football geography the brothers drink of choice was any denomination of lager. Such beers were not always “English” but the beer was served in an “English” pub and was priced far cheaper than the same pint served in Norway. However, from 2006 their tastes changed, henceforth their liquid preferences saw them buy into a more sophisticated “taste” synonymous with the “real ale” movement which was celebrated by drinking locally brewed “craft” beers (all brewed under the category of bitters and Indian Pale Ales) many produced by micro-breweries. In their argument this was a further pursuit of “English authenticity” and the search for a good pint added to both their itinerary and to the pursuit of knowledge as they sought out renowned pubs and breweries they had learned about through real ale aficionado message boards.

The accommodation the brothers chose was also “English” to a degree. Their choice of residence was not what other Norwegian tourists would normally seek out when in England, and had both tactical and friendship considerations. In London, the brothers initially stayed at a dreary cheap hotel close to the Paddington (central London) railway terminus, in the borough of Westminster, chosen because of its history in hosting Norwegian tourists. In 2008 this changed when they found a family-owned hotel close to the Kings Cross railway terminus in the London Borough of Camden, famed for its bohemianism and music scene.⁷⁶ In truth this reputation was not the attraction for the brothers so much, as was the boroughs ease of railway connections – the Arsenal stadium was just 3 km away and trains to Middlesbrough (some 350 km miles North) departed from Kings Cross. The accommodation was not too far from a welcoming (Irish owned) pubs serving very good beer. Combined, such features ensured that the brothers remained in this London locale for the next six years.

74 The English breakfast contains over 3,000 calories and has traditionally avoided the inclusion of fruit or vegetables. Originally eaten by the upper classes, the practice was emulated by the servants and then the lower social orders then spread throughout the Empire. Challenged from the 1960’s by the proliferation of cereals and in recent decades

by the diet industry, the “Full English” tradition lingers, although many today would only eat such fayre in a hotel or café, rather than in the domestic sphere.

- 75 A Norwegian travel agent who specialises in selling football tours to England via the internet, punctuates presentations of hotels with the imperative message “ENGLISH BREAKFAST!” suggesting that recent continental trends within the breakfast cuisines at hotels in England are unsuitable for marketing football package tours in Norway.

- 76 Camden, “Camden Profile.”

Outside of London, the brothers stayed for five years in two places. One was the small market town of Evesham⁷⁷ in rural Worcestershire (pop 23,500) some 140 km from Central London. Accommodation here was above a pub which approximated to what they considered to be a quintessential English “country pub” adorned as it was with (mock) Tudor wood beams but with full English breakfast included in the price. The Evesham connection began in a social media chat room of an Arsenal fan exiled from his London home. This electronically-inspired, trans-national friendship eventually produced a face-to-face meet and drink in London followed by years of mutual company. In Rotherham (some 270 km North of London) they lodged for £20 a night in a town centre pub frequented by motorbike enthusiasts and working-class locals. In Middlesbrough, they used a family-owned hotel in the centre of town that charged £20 for a room with full English breakfast. Its proximity to Hartlepool (some 22 km) meant no accommodation was sought in the latter.

The brothers were welcomed by the various proprietors they resided and drank with. Unusual and interesting, the brothers brought in extra business via the other Norwegian companions who occasionally travelled with them and the English-based friends with whom they socialised. Not all such occasions of friendship needed a football enthusiasm. Bjarte’s 40th birthday was celebrated in a Rotherham pub in the company of his parents and extended family, some of whom had travelled to England for the first time. With them were English football friends, pub locals who had got to know them over the years plus a dozen Brann fans who were part of that particular tour. All enjoyed a buffet of Norwegian smoked salmon and scrambled eggs provided by the celebrant. An end of night fight between the landlord’s wife and her daughter-in-law was provided free of charge and was considered to be a quintessentially “Rotherham” occasion, rather than an “English” one. The brothers spoke with anyone who passed their way-their journey was thus akin to pilgrimage albeit not all *en route* were followers of football.

Their match-going always built-in time to ensure they could socialise, over beer, with whoever would talk with them. Always situated in pubs in the vicinity of their intended football ground the brothers perpetuated a symbiosis of beer and football that was, and remains, integral to the English game.⁷⁸ Afterwards the brothers would enter pubs either in the same vicinity, or adjacent to the nearest railway station. The idea was always to encounter locals, talk football, and in such exchanges to put their home city and football club onto the footballing map. Occasionally this could prove disappointing and once, when in Coventry they recalled that nobody in a packed pub was minded to speak with them. Occasional hostility occurred with one memorable rendition of the defiant nationalist anthem of *Rule Britannia* aimed in their direction by a pub full of Peterborough supporters. However, most visits to pub premises did produce inquiries from the curious around their football shirts and badges, and from this a football-related camaraderie was generated with the mutual buying of pints

77 Anonymous, "Evesham."

78 Collins and Vamplew, *Mud, Sweat and Beers*.

of beer. The crucial factor in the brothers' travel was thus to build friendship networks through "talking football". Such conversation, we would argue, was a form of "talking in tongues" and focussed on issues beyond the personal and political. However, we need to ask if such speaking could be considered in any way to be "religious"?

6 Religious Perspectives and Dimensions

All football supporters, the brothers argued, have to travel. Support away from home is part of fandom and hence crucial to all fans' respective sense of being. The brothers' football journeys in the domestic setting were routine and did not attract any academic interest. However their journeys to England did, and crucial to what we are questioning is that such journeys were devoid of any notion of "compulsory volition".⁷⁹ In their travelling the brothers turned away from everyday vanities but reducing their journeys to "pilgrimage" – however we might define it – is problematic. There were no steps of any forbearers to follow, no dress code was specified, no trail was specified, no saint or martyr had their life revered en route. The journeying could be interrupted whenever they wanted. There was no *one* destination needed to claim they had "done" what their belief asked of them.

The *leitmotif* of the brothers' football following was essentially their pursuit of encounters and discoveries.⁸⁰ To the curious co-authors the brothers explained their journeying carried little more logic than "seeing a new place, meeting new people and enjoying a football match". They had no time for academic theories of the quasi-religious, nor did they consider themselves to be pilgrims – even secular ones. They would admit they travelled to sites they considered to be somewhat "sacred" but only by virtue of the imaginary that had seen English football moderated by radio and TV. They would add that another word other than "sacred" might be better utilised. They were not shy of receiving publicity or explaining their journeys but wary of the how such knowledge was produced.

The brothers' journeys fascinated both foreign hosts and fellow citizens. The Norwegian co-author of this paper, admiring their devotion arranged a meeting for a possible film with documentary makers and the brothers. Norwegian state TV put up 50% of the funding, the Norwegian Film Fund 20% and the Bergen based West Norwegian Film Council 30%. Five weeks filming in England ensued, combined with 10 days in Norway produced 80 hours of footage. In 2005 a 55-minute TV documentary entitled *Groundhoppers* was produced by the Norwegian *Flimmerfilm* company which premiered at the 2006 Cannes Film Festival. Broadcast on nationwide TV in February 2007, 25% of Norwegian TV viewers tuned in. A year later the brothers were the subject of a five-minute profile on the BBC's *Match of the Day* football programme, which examined

79 Cf. Reader, "Conclusions," 234–36.

80 Burchardt and Chiara, *Geographies of Encounter*.

their devotion to the two English clubs they also followed. Integral to both broadcasts was an air of wonderment at their dogged pursuit of visits to club grounds and their occasionally grueling schedule.

The production of knowledge at times animated the brothers. They specified they did not wish to be forever filmed in a pub with a beer in hand. As the filming for the documentary proceeded a degree of conflict appeared between those being filmed and those making the documentary. As one of those filming explains:

“We were laid back – they have regimental travel arrangements. We got told off for not being where we were supposed to when arranged and once for being five minutes late.” The brothers’ criticism of the film crew was: “They were eating all the time ... our train times were more important.” In the 12 games they were filmed at the TV crew captured the brothers’ ethos with the producer believing that the documentary had revealed:

“That football is a gateway to a social life ... It shows the passion that exists between Brann the football club, and the city of Bergen. It says something about men and how they have chosen a lifestyle ... it also examines elements of Norwegian life.” The documentary premiered in both Norwegian and English contexts. English mates the brothers had made during their journeys drank alongside 150 Bergen fans on a June 2005 Saturday evening for the premier hosted in a room above a Bergen pub. When premiered in England the documentary utilised the brothers usual Rotherham pub on a Saturday night in front of a crowd of 40, the audiovisual equipment provided by one of the four Norwegian cohorts travelling with them. The brothers made a pre-broadcast speech which consisted largely of a heart-felt thanks to all present for helping with their journeys. There was no media present, nor were any awards or other overt accolades received. There was a sense of communion but no ritual evident and no sense of divinity was mentioned in the speeches.

The brothers could boast a sense of the authentic in their journeys which others attempted to capitalise on. Expeditions to the English footballing Holy Land saw in the New Millennium local (Norwegian) entrepreneurs increasingly offering to facilitate such football excursions, thereby taking away most decision-making from those journeying.⁸¹ However the brothers’ search for “local authenticity”⁸² meant that they did not buy into what they considered as the “tamed package”.⁸³ Freed of any sense of commercial intervention or mediation the brothers’ sense of mission lacked any formal repertoire of appropriate action and attitude.

Others were permitted to join their journeys. Occasionally the brothers travelled around England with other Bergen citizens ever curious to accompany them. The latter did not seek instruction as to what they should do or what to visit. And whilst the brothers did not preach, neither did they consult. They simply planned and went; the others followed. No one could tell them how to “do”

81 Cf. Kaufman and Patterson, *Cross-National Cultural Diffusion*.

82 Cf. Cohen, “A Phenomenology of Tourist Experience.” 83 Cf.

Bauman, *Postmodernity*.

their pilgrimage. They pursued a football-inspired internationalism, and there were standards to maintain. Not particularly interested in footballing hype, “celebrity soccer” or chasing famous players for proximity the brothers never sought the autographs or “selfies” of footballers. The sociability that match day offered and the various senses of immersion that football support facilitated was their enchantment.

Piety did have a – subtle – place. In a Calvinistic way the brothers sought to lead by example especially with the issue of “appropriate” conduct. This could raise its head and with it the question as to whether the pilgrimage is legitimated in terms of the society of origin; or, if not, where does its legitimisation lie?⁸⁴ One incident stands out, when 2008 the brothers were part of a 3,000 strong Brann following attending a European fixture at Goodison Park the home of Liverpool-based Everton FC. The first fixture of this two-legged competition produced an away win for Everton though the game was more memorable with the throwing of a missile – a ceramic pool table ball bearing a number “6” onto the pitch, late in the game, from the visitors’ enclosure. The referee noted the missile, which had landed harmlessly and a ground steward removed the offending item. The football authorities took no further action. At the return fixture, which Brann lost 6-1, the brothers later drank with both Everton and Brann fans in a pub near to the ground. Returning in a cab to their hotel one of their fellow travellers (in his mid-20’s) revealed he had stolen a number 6 pool ball from the pub pool-table. This was to be a personal souvenir and, in his logic, was a way of getting back at the Everton fans who had stolen a similar ball from a Bergen bar. The brothers were not amused and asked the cab driver to return to the pub, whereupon they handed the pool-ball to the proprietor, without any explanation but with an apology for the “misunderstanding”.

Where might we place “religion” in this story? To pronounce football as a “religion”, if one defines religion as a spiritual belief system, can provoke accusations of the absurd. One might follow the argument of Spiro and refute the possibility of considering any non-theistic system as a “religion”.⁸⁵ We might also draw on Firth who argued, “sacramental rites have as their essential feature some change in the persons performing or attending the ritual”.⁸⁶ Around a football game, no such change is sought or expected; although football celebrates the aesthetic of beautiful play and confers qualities such as performative grace, it does not celebrate anything approximating to the “Holy”. And though a football performance can be unintentionally sublime, religion (as we define it) purposely promotes the spiritual through what is considered to be its sublime practices, celebrating concomitantly notions of good and truth, via the trilogy of faith, hope and charity.⁸⁷

That said, football can offer a sense of transcendence and provide for debates around the notions of belief and sacrifice. However, the context is designed by

84 Cf. Cohen, “A Phenomenology of Tourist Experience,” 190–91.

85 Spiro, “Religion.”

86 Firth, *Elements of Social Organisation*, 90. 87 Cf. Higgs, *God in the Stadium*, 77–79.

human beings for the delight of human beings, and the rules of the game carry no mysteries, for football does not inform us as to where we came from, where we might be going, or how to behave in this life to get to the next. The defeat of a team might provide a symbolic death and victory might hint at ecstasy, but as Chandler argues, sport exists to entertain and engage us, not disturb us with questions about destiny.⁸⁸ Simplified, “religion” attempts to explain the dilemmas of existence; football neither induces nor answers such curiosities.

Sometimes spirituality is found beyond religious congregations.⁸⁹ Accepting that football congregations are places of abundance, freedom and shared celebration and mockery,⁹⁰ we might see in such gatherings a sense of what Shilling and Mellor term

the “sporting sacred”.⁹¹ Drawing on the ideas of both Durkheim and Weber, these same authors recognise that whilst the sacred in the argument of Durkheim was something “set apart” with its own rites and qualities, Weberian notions of charisma and enchantment might add to the debate.⁹² Accepting that the collective assemblies of sporting occasions can provide passionate energies and intense individual experiences which can draw on Merleau-Ponty’s notion of “secondary consciousness”⁹³ such sport-inspired celebrations of the uncertain against the everyday and mundane witness people acting out religiosity in ways other than that proscribed by institutionalised religion. Football followings and the collective emotion of stadiums offer a sense of the communal via sung liturgies and flow experiences which could be considered sacred or at least suggest a sacramental footprint.⁹⁴ The locations that contain such congregations carry temporal and special dimensions which can draw on nature and culture.⁹⁵ A football stadium thus might be considered part of the material dimension of religious practice⁹⁶ capable of carrying elements of the holy and sacred – if considered in the sense of the self-transcendent.⁹⁷

So are the brothers’ journeys “religious” and do they contain elements of pilgrimage? At first sight the evidence is not compelling. The brothers did not travel to seek healing nor forgiveness, and nothing is solved in their journeys. No liturgy is followed. No denial or penitence is practiced; no sense of loss is pursued or replaced. The diabolical does not feature; and Grace, the unmerited favour of God, has no place in football loyalties. A sense of renewal is

88 Chandler, *American Sports Culture*; cf. Scotch, “Magic, Sorcery and Football;” Guttman, *From Ritual to Record*.

89 Bain-Selbo, *Game Day*, 232.

90 See Bakhtin, *Rabelais*.

91 Shilling and Mellor, “Re-Conceptualizing Sport.”

92 See Reitter and Willmon, *Charisma and Disenchantment*.

93 Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behaviour*, 168–69.

94 Ellis, *The Games People Play*, 162–227.

95 See Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place*, 46–47; Béres, “A Thin Place,” 178.

96 Smart, *The World’s Religions*, 22–24. 97 See Ellis, “Sporting Space.”

always evident in their activities, but not a sense of cleansing.⁹⁸ A vision – both actual and in the imagination – is realized; but essentially the brothers’ journeys are a continual return with no ending.

More compelling is the realisation that the brothers seek stimulation – and ultimately one might argue, a form of perfection. And we recognise that they do pursue temporary transformation, as they journey from the “routine” to the “exceptional”. Their journeys might thus be reflective of a *zeitgeist*: when major traditional religious beliefs and practices are in decline, “pilgrimage” as a concept is thus increasingly meaningless because the frameworks in which they were established are in similar decline. Into this milieu, we argue, has grown in many individuals a search for “authenticity” and “self-identity” sometimes manifesting themselves in what we can term secular pilgrimages, evident in a variety of

enthusiasms inseparable from *sojourning* (temporary stay) experiences. These can be polytheistic or monotheistic and undertaken at places considered “sacred” or at the very least very significant for a whole host of reasons resonant to the individuals’ biography. The brothers’ journeys are thus best considered a form of cultural tourism wherein movement in itself is an event that seeks the further event of a live football match in a designated football ground as the targeted experience. Both aspects of travel are perceived to be educational and carry the pleasant by-product of friendship and memories.⁹⁹

The brothers travel with a sense of destinations but none that might be considered endearing. On top of this the various destinations, once arrived at, are not really “celebrated”. The actual journey evidences that which Urry would call “imaginative travel”.¹⁰⁰ Such movement is of greater significance than the destination and significant because the journey can provide for the sense of transcendence as much as the 90 minute football match. Their journeys and the practices *en route* cannot be considered only through the lens of businessinspired post-secular issues.¹⁰¹ Whilst that considered the authentic is sought it does not *overly* concern them.¹⁰² At one level the authenticity is the performance of the football players on the pitch at the matches they attend, combined with the perceived authentic behaviours of the spectating fans. There are thus various performativities at play which combined constitute a vague notion of “English” which the brothers find enchanting and which they buy into at various levels aware at the same time they have a diplomatic mission on behalf of their home town.

Along such journeys miracles and extraordinary sightings are not sought. Danger is not a consideration, the word “sanctuary” is never heard; there is no revelation nor visitation. Hospitality is not expected of the hosts. Sharing what they have *en route* in chance encounters is part of the pursuit most frequently

98 Cf. Turner and Turner, *Images and Pilgrimages*, 30.

99 Pine and Gilmore, *The Experience Economy*; Getz and Page, *Event Studies*; Ferdinand and Kitchin, *Events Management*.

100 Urry, “Mobility and Proximity.” 101 See Bailey, “Pilgrimage.” 102 Cf. Zukin, *Naked City*.

evident in the buying of a pint of beer to share with strangers who by now are acquaintances. The journeys are the *foci* for projection and interpretation and carry meaning at both a personal and collective level with experiences that are emotional rather than intellectual or spiritual. The brothers made their journeys with the aim of pursuing new knowledge. Such journeying never sought strict order and eschewed hierarchies as borders both geographical, social and psychological were crossed. What mattered most to the brothers were non-routine occasions; they sought and found time-out from their contained and controlled daily lives utilising the easy sociality of “football talk” and beer drinking as they pursued – and usually obtained – that much sought sense of occasion. These movements to the academic observer were somewhat unreflexive, this is because they were “lived” as opposed to being something that required consideration and articulation.

If “pilgrimage” is best defined as “praying with your feet” then the brothers epitomise that pursuit, but add to the cliché by making us consider the role of the taste buds in that activity; beer and breakfast mattered. Along the journeys the

brothers turn away from some of their everyday vanities in pursuit of new pleasures, these are similar to their Bergen/Norwegian ones, only in a different language. The centre was always “Englishness” with that nation perceived to carry the soul of the game and the heart of football. They thus seek and find transcendence beyond their routine habitus¹⁰³ by constructing their own experiential economy,¹⁰⁴ which, at times is both diverse and revelatory and open to new possibilities in both accommodation and consumption. And, though at times they celebrated taboo-breaking through excessive beer drinking and the consumption of carbohydrates, this was always considered to be the exception not the rule.¹⁰⁵

Their journeys sought a transcendental epiphany of “connectedness” of people, places and experiences.¹⁰⁶ The sacred centre of Englishness defined in the symbiosis of football, beer and breakfasts was pursued in much the same way that Western *aficianados* of martial arts sought in their journeys to the Far East, i.e., with a sense of authenticity to the passion played out in their home.¹⁰⁷ This “elective centre” whilst geographical is also spiritual because the pursuit of it has origins in the enthusiasts native society.¹⁰⁸ Be it immersing themselves in local (English) culture, or bringing their Bergen social networks with them, personal memory is ever-brought into the present and implicitly encompassed notions of childhood, self-identity and imagination. Their journeys are thus best considered as a convergence of trajectories¹⁰⁹ which features the pursuit of processes,

103 Rojek, *Event Power*, 4.

104 Pine and Gilmore, *The Experience Economy*.

105 Cf. Urry and Larsen, *The Tourist Gaze*.

106 Cf. Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*.

107 Cf. Cynarski and Sieber, “A Martial Art Warrior as Tourist.” 108 Cf. Cohen, “A Phenomenology of Tourist Experience,” 186. 109 Cf. Nikolaisen, “Embedded Motion,” 136.

and the never-ending “instrument of insight”.¹¹⁰ The brothers celebrate in such movement a web of selves that they create, sustain and carry.¹¹¹ The social capital that arises from this it affirms the sacralisation of leisure which is integral to being human.¹¹² Drawing on Khalifa the football pilgrims of Norway discover in their footballing Mecca only what they take to such a Mecca.¹¹³

In March 2012 the Brothers visited Millmoor, then the home of Rotherham United FC and thus completed their target of attending a game at all 92 grounds in the English professional leagues. Their celebration – in the company of mates from both Bergen and English born fans from six clubs – revealed that in the course of their 15 year sojourn the Brothers had also drank a beer in 500 pubs. “Now what?”, they were asked:

Kjell: “Not sure ... relax, have a holiday – probably in the UK – but maybe just as tourists.”
Bjarte: “We could start on the Conference grounds – but where do we stop?”

They did not stop. The ensuing three years saw their collection of stadiums expand to include the Conference (the fifth tier of the English footballing pyramid) and indeed grounds from the sixth and seventh tiers of the English game. Theirs was a “game” with no ending and no final item to collect. It had no end point.

Until the Divine entered their journeys and in doing so ended them. In early 2016 Kjell was taken ill whilst in London on yet another visit to another series of football grounds. As always the brothers would enchant those also in attendance whose numbers were now usually in the dozens and not in the tens of thousands. At the end of that tour, shortly after landing in Bergen Kjell fell ill and died. The football pilgrim *par excellence* had his final journey in a funeral cortege in his home city which attracted so many that those attending boasted the parade was visible from heaven. Some attending organised a collection. The monies raised paid for a pavement tile that bore the deceased's name and dates of birth and death. The tile was laid alongside hundreds of similar ones bearing various dedications in an area outside of the Emirates stadium officially sanctioned by the Arsenal football club for such purposes.¹¹⁴ Citizens of Bergen who travel to watch games in London are known to visit the tile; some leave a flower on it by way of remembrance. The tile acts as both a focus and a memorial for those who journey from Bergen to England seeking their own football occasions to be later shared over beer with the fascinated and the enthusiastic.

110 Locke, *The Quest for the Holy Grail*; MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 204.

111 See Chang, *Autoethnography as Method*, 13.

112 See Kielbasiewicz and Drazdowska, "Leisure time;" Wearing, Stevenson, and Young, *Tourist Culture*. These ideas and references are taken from Berners, "An Events Industry Takes Shape." 113 Khalifa, *The Fifth Pillar*, 92.

114 For the origin, meaning, and function of these (commemorative) tiles in British and continental European football, see Herzog, "'Be a part of Ibrox forever.'"

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115 For the conference report, see Herzog, "Tagungsbericht."

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