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Writing, stitching, inking. Different modes of creating historical narratives

Av Katarzyna Herd

Abstract

This article presents an analysis of different ways of producing historical narratives in the Swedish football environment. The examples are based on the activities around AIK, a top league football club from Stockholm. In the article I present a tifo and a tattoo, stitching and inking, as actual modes of writing history. Big clubs like AIK not only attract many fans, but also stimulate creative engagements which lead to different expressions of affection and devotion towards the club. Historical elements appear often in such activities, connecting the present supporters to the heritage of the club.

Keywords: football, fans, identity, transmitting history

Introduction

This article analyses alternative modes of writing and transmitting history, challenging the official narrative and making different expressions possible. The aim is then to explore how some narratives can be constructed and how they can be expressed in the football context, making it both the goal and the background. It should be stated that the 'grand histories' written and published about clubs are not regarded here as mere 'facts'. Although such publications are critical and aim to give a thorough picture, history is always composed according to a certain standpoint.⁴³ The past is neither neutral nor objective. Looking at somewhat untraditional expressions of applying historical narratives problematizes the field and shows the flexibilities and possibilities that are available for different actors present in this particular scene.

Football's liminal character and the possibility of changing a collective phenomenon to individual experience provide an arena of personal involvement that can take different forms.⁴⁴ The personal engagement and freedom of expression that exists there allows for selection and focus on certain motives while ignoring others. Further, in the ever changing and turbulent environment that football is, history serves as a reassuring frame of continuity and stability. The very existence is a proof of success.

The football club used here is AIK, established in Stockholm in 1891. AIK supporters are very proud of their history. The club's birthday, its founder and

⁴³ See Hayden White, 1972

⁴⁴ Herd, 2016

the location of their former arena Råsunda have become sacred elements in AIK's mythology. All those elements appear often in different forms, among others, in different formal and artistic expressions relating to the club. Different sorts of year books or commemorating publications appear regularly, reusing and reframing AIK's rich history. At the same time, groups of supporters take the liberty in taking certain symbols to communicate their presence, their devotion as well as their identity on big flags and banners that appear during matches. Further, individuals use their bodies as canvas for AIK-related tattoos, lending their own flesh in the club's service, and at the same time making those motives their very own, entangled in personal aesthetic choices.

The ethnographic material

Methodologically, this article is based on ethnographic fieldwork from 2015 and 2016. The material presented here is a fraction of research conducted for a PhD project in performing and producing history in four Swedish clubs – AIK, Djurgårdens IF, MFF and Helsingborgs IF. For the purpose of the project 38 interviews were conducted with various supporters, current players, former players, and officials from all four clubs, also sixteen matches were observed. The interviewees were semi-structured, and questions touched upon personal histories connected to clubs, meaningful events, upheavals, and historical developments in football. The set of questions dependent on informants' positions and willingness to contribute. Thus, this article presents just a few of interviews and observations, but the background is richer and deeper, allowing the writer to select just a few strong voices for the purpose of this text.⁴⁵

The material consists also of observations and internet ethnography (netnography). The names of the informants were changed to protect their anonymity. For the same reason, the degree of their involvement with the club has been omitted. The data acquired through netnography is supplementary in character.⁴⁶ The two pictures discussed in the text were retrieved from AIK's Facebook page in 2015. The photo albums managed there are open to be viewed without any previous registration. The use of internet for this article did not produce the core ethnographic material, but in itself it has been acknowledged as a field that could be analysed in the same way as any other ethnographic field with its peculiarities.⁴⁷ Using the internet as an extra source for researching the football culture also helps to contextualize the activities in virtual reality.

While collecting ethnographic material one has to be open to different sources that built up a fragmented picture of culturally meaningful practices.⁴⁸ Eclectic material, consisting of bits and pieces from different media, helps to

45 The fieldwork material is in the possession of the researcher.

46 Davies, 2008, p. 115

47 Davies, 2008, p. 159-164

48 Ehn & Löfgren, 2001, p. 147

get a multidimensional and deep understanding of a phenomenon in question. It is also how this environment is constructed and sustained. When in the field one has to acknowledge the manifold of expressions. Thus, sources like books, newspapers, internet pages not only provide information that could be referred to as facts but could be also analysed how ideas, problems and issues are communicated, translated and transformed in a society.⁴⁹

Theoretical frame

The examples of making and presenting history are based on a tifo displayed at Friends Arena in 2014 and a tattoo that was made available to the public viewing through AIK's Facebook page. Although they are not technically written sources, they can be viewed as composed stories soaked in AIK's history. Thus, they are different forms of a narrative, designed to tell a story and to present a world view from a certain perspective. David Herman gives such a definition of a narrative:

Narrative, in other words, is a basic human strategy for coming to terms with time, process, and change – a strategy that contrasts with, but is in no way inferior to, “scientific” modes of explanation that characterize phenomena as instances of general covering laws.⁵⁰

Rather than focusing on the actual history, the aim of this article is to show how fandom around football uses historical references in creative, artistic expressions, thus contributing to composing and consolidating the narratives.⁵¹ While doing so, this article problematizes different arenas of history-writing and different actors that can participate in this process. Certainly, some forms of narratives, usually printed as heavy volumes, tend to be treated as more objective or reliable but any usage of the bygone places it in a frame of past-present-future that influences the tone of narration and interpretations of the ‘facts’.⁵² Rather than dividing the composed histories as more or less factual, I would shift the attention to creativity that is allowed within using those history-based narratives. This article points out to a flexible side of application of the past within a certain sport context (in this case football), that allows individuals to express themselves uniquely, though through a collective frame.

While displaying history, a group identity can be reaffirmed, or individual ideological stands revealed. As the presented modes of narrative production are very different, they in turn activate different theoretical approaches. Thus, Jan Assmann's cultural memory, intertextuality and aspect of legend as a literary genre of a narrative are employed to analyse the material. Such

⁴⁹ Ehn & Löfgren, 2001, p.151

⁵⁰ Herman, 2009, p.2

⁵¹ Löfgren, forthcoming

⁵² White, 1972, p. 21-25

theoretical approach lifts up personal connections and interpretations that happen in football constantly. It also problematizes the idea of the so-called 'official history', as even such sources are contextualized in the ever moving flow of references and their applications.

Writing a story through history

Sporting events such as football attract attention and tantalize societies, and it inspires a considerable amount of research as well. Cultural scholar Tara Brabazon lifts up the meaning of sport, football in particular. It has the ability to captivate spectators and create meanings. As she writes:

While sport is trivial, it has a powerful symbolic significance and consequence. For disempowered communities, sport is able to carry popular memory from week to week, from season to season. The shirts, scarves, songs and humour incubate a sense of place, even when terraces are lost, stadia are demolished and television coverage discards local sensitivities for globalized coverage.⁵³

This popular memory, entangled in a bigger picture of a club with one hundred years of history, creates a special social space for making history. Also, the stories that happen during games are just a fraction of all the possible narratives that include wider social contexts. And even the events on the pitch are not restricted to the concrete structures of stadiums, as they are written about, photographed and printed, commented online and mocked in future chants.⁵⁴

AIK as a club is very productive in publishing and attracting all sorts of football-related material, for example jubilee books⁵⁵, photo albums, like one commemorating Råsunda stadium⁵⁶, or a collection of match chronicles from 2003 to 2009⁵⁷. Further, there have been academic publications in the field of football research, including those by sport historians Torbjörn Andersson and Hans Bolling⁵⁸. While Andersson included AIK in a wider spectrum of the last 50 years of Swedish football, Bolling devoted his book to 116 years of the club's existence, finishing his narration with the last match played at the Råsunda stadium, after which the club moved to the new arena. The manifold of literature around AIK is truly impressive and the publications often take more personal shapes. Quite a few supporters embarked on producing written account of their journey as fans. Aage Radmann from Malmö University analysed hit-and-tell literature available in Sweden, with books like Johan Höglund's *En av Grabbarna*, or Magnus Hagström's, Peter Johansson's and Carl Jurell's account

53 Brabazon, 2006, p. 35

54 Brabazon, 2006, p. 36

55 Allmänna Idrottsklubben 100 ÅR. Idrottshistoria med Guldkant, 1991

56 Alla Hatar Mig, 2013

57 helä vägen – svart & gul. En resa i tiden 2003 – 2009, 2011

58 Andersson, 2016; Bolling 2013

*Va för jävla pack e ni?*⁵⁹. In those books a rather intimate relationship with the club is presented, one that explores supporters' commitment that could end in bloody fights. This is yet another form of affective engagement that provokes a surge in written material.

Besides the official big and heavy albums and carefully composed jubilee bricks there are very personal accounts of one's journey with a specific club. One publication that seems to be in-between is Per-Olof Sännås' book called *Black Army* (1998) and dedicated to perhaps the most known supporter organization in Sweden that is affiliated with AIK. The author is a photographer who, according to the note on the back cover, spent three years with youths on the stands, thus making a modern documentary about football, fanatics, sport and society. Thus, the book zooms to a specific group of people who share passion and a special connection to the club. This group takes then a stage as a protagonist in AIK's history, writing their own at the same time, and being written about from a certain perspective by a journalist.

The physical act of writing is not the only way football fans have to display, challenge or create history. In this article I shall argue that one could view activities like tifo-making or even tattooing as examples of writing and composing history. Since the core references for interpretation here are created by supporters, one should acknowledge vast forms of fandom research, expressed for example in the Swedish context in publications by Joakim Glaser, Aage Radmann and Torbjörn Andersson.⁶⁰ This article could be then placed within this research frame, with its focus on physical representations of performative elements based on historical readings of a football club.

In her book *Playing at the Periphery* Tara Brabazon discusses photographs of Stuart Clarke and his cycle 'Homes of Football' that illustrates English football fans.⁶¹ Brabazon mentions certain elements that shine through the pictures – masculinity, joy and grief, social conflicts, power struggles, working class and nostalgia. Sport encourages nostalgia and publications such as Sännås' book construct a certain past that drips with emotional engagement, making it so captivating. This historical display is printed on paper, whereas it is possible to make history while showing off history for a few brief minutes during matches. All one needs, is some stitching.

Stitching present to the past

As the Italian-inspired ultras⁶² movements grew popular in Sweden, so did the understanding for proper framing of a match. So called 'tifo-groups'⁶³ emerged.

⁵⁹ Radmann, 2015

⁶⁰ See Glaser 2015, Andersson & Radmann 1998, Andersson & Radmann 1999, Radmann 2015

⁶¹ Brabazon, 2006, p. 11

⁶² See Testa, 2009, 2010; Testa & Armstrong, 2008; Kassimeris, 2011

⁶³ Those in tifo groups do not have to be active ultras members, but there is a lot of movement

They plan, design and execute beautiful and spectacular canvas or routines at the beginning of matches. Magnus Hagström, Peter Johansson and Carl Jurell who wrote a book about supporter culture in Stockholm state that the first tifo-like activities appeared in the mid-1990s.⁶⁴ They list as one of the first examples a section flag that was displayed by AIK. Once the activities were picked up by media and shown on TV, the trend has been gaining speed. Nowadays, all big clubs have organizations driven by fans that specialize in making beautiful and complicated displays that communicate the club's identity and provide framing for matches. The creative engagement expressed by groups of fans is a rather common phenomenon within fandom and different forms of artistic expressions that could be called 'folk art' have been researched.⁶⁵

Otto, a former member of a tifo-making organization remarked that there were not as many people joining because it is quite a lot of work one has to do to make a tifo happen.⁶⁶ Otto listed several stages of work, like sketching, making a detailed plan, ordering fabric, and dividing the picture into squares that are scaled and transferred onto the fabric before the final sketching, stitching and painting.⁶⁷ It is also interesting how tifo-groups are financed. As Otto explained:

There has been an ideological discussion about money going on. Some thought we could accept money from the club, but we decided against it, we only accept donations. It is like this: you see what you've paid for. If you give us some money we will try to make as good tifo as possible, but only with what money we get. You see what you've paid for.⁶⁸

AIK was one of the first to engage in this sort of creativity, together with other Stockholm clubs. Tifos became a usual sign on Swedish arenas, letting supporters display in big letters and pictures their pride or frustration, disapproval of football's governing bodies and their decisions, or mocking the opponent teams.⁶⁹ But rather often tifos play with historical elements, dates and heroes, founding fathers and by-gone glories. One example of an extraordinary narrative is a tifo presented during a match against Malmö FF at Friends Arena in 2014. A gigantic picture showed six men important for the club and a text 'Råsunda's Legends':

between groups usually and the very style, choreography of display, is inspired by Italian fans.

64 Hagström, Johansson, Jurell, 2010, p. 137

65 Löfgren, forthcoming

66 The term 'tifo' is used commonly by fans to describe the displayed choreography, and I use it in that sense here.

67 Interview with Otto, 2016

68 Interview with Otto, 2016

69 Filed notes, 2015-2016



Image 1. Picture taken from AIK's Facebook page, displayed in October 2014 (retrieved 2015).

This picture is circulating on the internet, and even the club made it into a limited edition T-shirts that generated income for the tifo group.⁷⁰ The individuals portrayed there are, from left to right, Henry “Garvis” Carlsson, Sune “Mona-Lisa” Andersson, Ivan Turina, Isidor Behrens, Rudolf “Putte” Kock and Gustav “Gurra” Sjöberg. The famous men were important for the club, played there for years, spent time at Råsunda Stadium and died within AIK’s frame. It is also interesting to notice that Råsunda is a history in itself, not only as a long-standing arena for AIK, but also in a fact that it has been closed in 2012 and turned into rubble.

Carlsson was playing in AIK between 1939-1948 making 192 appearances and scoring 92 goals, and he also played professionally for Stade Français 1948-1949 and Atletico Madrid 1949-1953.⁷¹ Sune Andersson was a player in AIK in years 1946-1950. He also played in AS Roma for 2 years.⁷² Ivan Turina was a goal keeper from Croatia who died unexpectedly in 2013. Isidor Behrens was the founder and the first chairman of AIK. Rudolf “Putte” Kock was a striker in AIK (1918-1928) but also a hockey player, bridge player, TV journalist and AIK’s chairman (1945-1953).⁷³ Finally Gustav Sjöberg was AIK’s goalkeeper between 1932 and 1950.⁷⁴ These men had remarkable impact for the club, and the knowledge about them has been used as a form of capital, visible for example of the club’s Facebook page as fans proudly displayed their expertise in those characters. One needs to know the history.

⁷⁰ <http://www.aikshop.se/sv/articles/2.425.2888/ts-rasundas-legend>

⁷¹ <http://svenskfotboll.se/landslag/hall-of-fame/sfs-hall-of-fame/carlsson-henry-garvis/>

⁷² <http://www.aik.se/fotboll/historik/500aikare/suneande.html>

⁷³ <http://svenskfotboll.se/landslag/hall-of-fame/sfs-hall-of-fame/?profile=16742>

⁷⁴ <http://www.aik.se/fotboll/historik/500aikare/gustsjob.html>

In the tifo there are stitched together several generations, stretching from 19th century to 2013. Players are together with the chairmen, framed in the context of Råsunda, which disappearance was a heavy blow to AIK supporters that also took place fairly recently, but the arenas history is 75 years long.⁷⁵ The arrangement focuses on AIK as the social marker of stability here, bringing together different decades of the past, different life stories and personalities, but also different entities, as a concrete structure of non-existing now arena frames the display.

The use of the word 'legends' in this particular tifo is interesting. Obviously, being in plural it refers to the individuals portrayed on the gigantic canvas as legends, as being legendary. But the word marks a specific genre of storytelling and it has some characteristics that can help to further unpack this unique display stitched together by AIK supporters. William Bascom gives such definition of a legend:

Legends are prose narratives which, like myths, are regarded as true by the narrator and his audience, but they are set in a period considered less remote, when the world was much as it is today. Legends are more often secular than sacred, and their principal characters are human. They tell of migrations, wars and victories, deeds of past heroes, chefs and kings.⁷⁶

The set of men on display can certainly be put in the legendary category. Their deeds made AIK great, remarkable, unforgettable. But in turn it was their affiliation to AIK that made them remembered. One could not score goals outside of the pitch. Thus, their immortality is grounded in the football club, which in turn feeds on their personalized glories, and now it is also connected to a specific group that made the tifo, displaying their artistry and creativity. The choice of characters is of course selective. AIK presents on its web page five hundred profiles of players whose paths went through the club.⁷⁷ Although all the genres of different narratives deal with human participants, they relate to them differently and also use them to communicate slightly different world view. Max Lühti in his comparison of a fairy tale (*Märchen*) and legend states:

The legend also gives a description of man. It is different from that of the *Märchen* [fairy tale] because the viewpoint of the legend is different. The *Märchen* considers man; the legend considers what happens to man. The *Märchen* outlines the narrow road of the hero walking through the world and does not dwell on the figures meeting him. But the legend looks fixedly at the inexplicable which confronts man (...). More than once it has been shown that the historical legend in particular sketches man as someone enduring fate rather than shaping or mastering it. But the man of the legend is not more

⁷⁵ Field notes, 2015

⁷⁶ Bascom, 1984, p. 9.

⁷⁷ <http://www.aik.se/fotboll/historik/500aikare/spelarna.html>

passive than he of the *Märchen* in every respect. In thinking and interpreting, in the spiritual conflict with the powers meeting him, he is far more self-reliant and active than the hero of the *Märchen*, who accepts almost everything as self-evident. Not only his thoughts, misgivings, and fears arise out of his own soul, but also his decisions and deeds, whereas the hero of the *Märchen* is guided and moved through gifts, instructions, obstacles and aids.⁷⁸

The narrative of any football club is more of a legend than a fairy tale. Constant financial troubles, injuries, leaving investors, missed penalties, conflicts within supporters, unfavourable press – these are just some of the dangers that an average club can endeavour.⁷⁹ The men represented on this spectacular tifo emphasize the struggles and survival. Their personal tragedies and victories are framed within AIK's own history which is a narrative of dreams that are rarely fulfilled. But like with a legend as a genre, the club and its trouble are more important than the characters involved. The figures can change, one player can become more relevant than another, but the action that enchants the club is what counts.⁸⁰

Equally intriguing is the role of Råsunda, the lost and destroyed arena and the context of displaying the tifo, which was at the new arena. All interviewed AIK supporters named the closing of AIK's former home arena as a devastating experience. David in an interview recorded in March 2015 referred to that space as "an open wound"⁸¹. It became a frame for memories and emotions that all of a sudden were homeless. A display of this proportion, the tifo on the picture above, transforms and transports them symbolically to the new space, the Friends Arena. It is a statement of remembrance but also a present proclamation of the new era and marking of a new territory. AIK's current home stadium is not owned by the club, it is also criticized by the fans, deemed too big and generic, designed for concerts and events rather than football.⁸² Nevertheless, Friends Arena has to become home, at least for some time, and needs to be meaningful. One way to connect it to the cultural processes is to transfer symbolically the narratives from AIK's rich historical resources.

The statement of the tifo translates to the legendary character of its display. Folklorists Linda Dégh and Andrew Vázsonyi point out that legends usually communicate something, although it might be questioned if the teller of the tale needs to believe in it.⁸³ However, I would suggest that while showing off their organizational skills and deep cultural heritage in form of deceased heroes, supporters also state their need to believe that not only in new glory and success that should follow, but that the tides of time, like moving to the

⁷⁸ Lühti, 1976, p. 24

⁷⁹ Herd, 2013

⁸⁰ Lühti, 1976, p. 29.

⁸¹ Interview with David, 2015

⁸² Filed notes, 2015

⁸³ Dégh & Vázsonyi, 1976, p. 94-123

emotionless new arena, would not destroy or damage AIK's future. As Susan M. Stabile, writing about material culture, puts it:

More than artefactual, material culture is also experiential and affective, rooted in human practices and rituals, desires and associations, symbolic and contingent meanings. (...) In short, material culture embodies and evokes memory.⁸⁴

Stitching together the present and the past perhaps works best to preserve the present, and not the past as such. The complex canvas serves multiple purposes at once: it writes a certain narrative, it is a display of power and skills, it consolidates a group's image, and it also composes history in a sport context. In other words, 'People invest symbolic power in objects; objects, in turn, prompt particular thoughts, emotions, and memories'⁸⁵. This tifo marks history of AIK, but also sets up a narrative for the group that made it happen. It has, in turn, become a history, largely thanks to the digital footprint that now such displays can have, living independent life online. Yet, powerful narratives full of heroes and glory can be transformed into a particular, personal design that incorporates group and individual interests on one canvas, and letting one carry one special story inked into one's skin.

Inking the narratives

While the tifo routines make it possible for supporters to become more visible and to have another memory anchor attached to the club, fans can go a step further and use their own bodies for AIK's history. Football-related tattoos are not a new phenomenon; clubs' crests have been a popular motive among fans. However, some clubs seem to generate more ink-enthusiasts than others. AIK has a photo album on its Facebook page with more than 400 photos of different tattoos, old and new, big and tiny. Tattoos as such have certain history and position in society. Ethnologist Birgitta Svensson points out that although the cultural misapprehensions of this form of art have mostly disappeared, it is still considered a strong identity marker, a life-long commitment written on own body.⁸⁶ Previously associated with criminality and lower social classes, nowadays tattoos are mainstream and appreciated for their execution and variety of themes.

Still, tattoos are not freed from stigma and they do transform the body into a canvas for cultural exchange of signs and meanings, as Jean Baudrillard pointed out: 'The naked body is an expressionless mask hiding each of the true natures. By this he meant that the body only has meaning when it is marked, covered in inscriptions'⁸⁷. In that context, the body becomes the

⁸⁴ Stabile, 2013, p. 197

⁸⁵ Stabile, 2013, p. 196

⁸⁶ Svensson, 1998, p. 35

⁸⁷ Baudrillard, 1993, p. 105

‘material for symbolic exchange’⁸⁸ and can be used to ‘express a symbol of an important past event, love, or friendship, group membership, and/or a marker of individuality’⁸⁹. Such motivations on getting inked are usually given from psychological perspective. In their article about growing popularity of tattoos, Carmen, Guitar, and Dillion state that this is also a display of symbolic thought, a natural extension of cave-paintings that included bodies as carriers for different cultural messages.⁹⁰ Further, the authors argue that although a specific tattoo marks group identity, it also makes individuals stand out, which marks a win-win relationship. People are not silent canvas but they, quite literally, embody and perform the messages inked in their skin.

Interviewed tattoo artists from Stockholm said that AIK’s crest was a popular motive for some time, but recently more and more opted for football-related tattoos, including bigger projects, like sleeves and back tattoos.⁹¹ Both artists considered it more popular for people to come nowadays with a set of AIK-concerned symbols that they wanted, and then the list would be incorporated into a cohesive picture. Among the most popular motives were Isidor Behrens (AIK’s founder), the club’s former arena Råsunda, AIK’s crest and Stockholm represented in different forms. All those elements appeared in a magnificent work shown below:

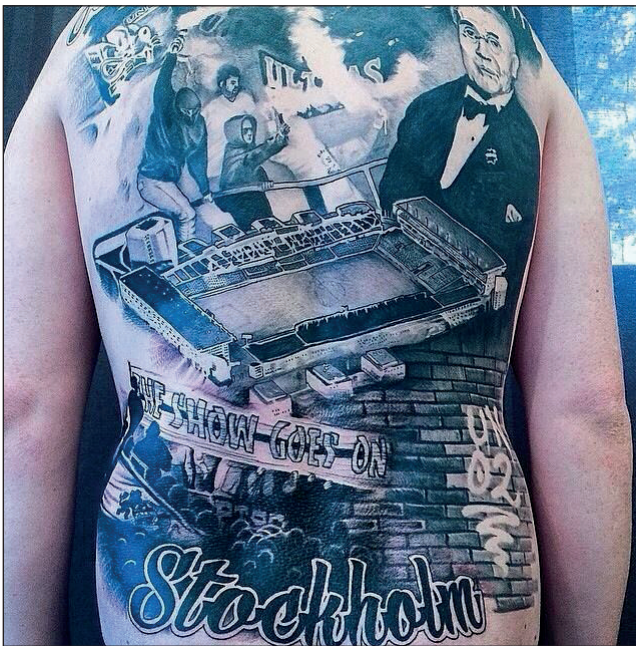


Image 2. Picture retrieved from AIK’s Facebook page, 2015.

88 Baudrillard, 1993, p. 107

89 Carmen, Guitar, Dillion, 2012, p. 134

90 Carmen, Guitar, Dillion, 2012, p. 137

91 Interview with Håkan and Henrik, 2016

The artist who made this tattoo remarked that the planning alone took about eight hours, with roughly 25 hours for the actual inking. The display includes Isidor Behrens, Råsunda, supporters with flares, allusions to ultras movement⁹², Stockholm's silhouette, and a version of the rat used in different forms by AIK and its supporters. It is impressive and certainly it contextualizes quite a few historical narratives that are connected to the club. Dedicating an entire back to the AIK's past shows commitment, but the choice of references is especially intriguing. At the same time, the club is not named at all. One has to be able to navigate through this puzzle to get the references.

The tattoo presented here is also an example of intertextuality that works within this context and that is translated from AIK's history and used to compose a personal narrative. Intertextuality means that a text (understood broadly) is not taken as 'a self-contained structure but as differential and historical. Texts are shaped not by immanent time but by the play of divergent temporalities. Texts are therefore not structures of presence but traces and tracings of otherness. They are shaped by the repetition and the transformation of other textual structures'⁹³. Basically, to understand fully the presented tattoo one has to consider not only AIK as a club but its history and a certain evaluation of this history too. The images build up a vision of history that is framed historically in a specific time period. One could for example say that in the years of its inking the debates around ultras groups were quite heated, further polarizing opinions whether this type of support is good or not.⁹⁴

The intertextuality of this display runs deep. To make sense, this tattoo needs to be contextualized. The shape of the arena has to be interpreted as Råsunda, the old man in the suit has to be recognizable as the founder of the club. One has to be aware of the reference to the rat as an established symbol of AIK as well. Then Stockholm is contextualized too. In the discussion attached to the picture some pointed out that AIK is a Solna club as it is based in that part of the capital. It was mentioned then that AIK was established in the very city-centre on a street called Biblioteksgatan and it was an inner-city club which then moved to the football stadium in Solna which it also financed.⁹⁵ This exchange has deeper meaning as it is claimed sometimes that the only Stockholm derby is Djurgården's IF vs. Hammarby IF, as AIK is not placed in Stockholm.⁹⁶ One needs to know the history behind one's back, and the discussion about the actual locality shows how flexible references can be. AIK

92 For more about the ultras groups see Testa, 2009, 2010

93 Frow, 1990, p. 45-55

94 Many newspapers engaged in the debate during years 2014-2015, for example: <http://www.hd.se/2015-10-02/sprakande-debatt-om-bengaler>; <http://www.aftonbladet.se/debatt/debattamnen/sport/artikel19701677.ab>

95 Hagström, Johansson, Jurell, 2010

96 Interview with Joel, 2015

was established in a heart of the capital, thus it could claim being a Stockholm club, should it wish to.

Further, the person decorated in the tattoo is going to be read intertextually too, as the voluntary carrier of strong messages, not only of being a supporter of a specific club that is charged with negative emotions⁹⁷, but also taking a position in a debate on the use of flares at Swedish stadiums. After 2000 this activity has been viewed in a mix of admiration, fascination and also disapproval.⁹⁸ A reference to flares opens up a heated discussion about support and the position of supporters, which marks its own history of developments within the fan scene and the varied ways one can express his/her engagement. It also touches upon the concerns of the economic and structural changes in football.⁹⁹ In other words, there are ideologies that transcend many levels of social structures expressed on the man's back.

Both tattoo artists, Henrik and Håkan, commented on Isidor Behrens being a father-figure for the club and thus being often chosen as a motive by supporters. Also the arena Råsunda has recently become a popular symbol since it was closed and dismantled, and the club started using a new stadium called Friends Arena. Råsunda exists now symbolically on many arms, backs and ribs. One of the artists said that his client got a tattoo of the specific section at the arena where he used to go to watch matches. Jean Baudrillard commented on the practice of marking bodies in 'archaic societies' as a kind of masking practice that would change the body to material for symbolic exchange¹⁰⁰. The carefully selected elements that are going to appear on skin do glorify the club and its history, but also praise their owners who express specific consciousness and creativity in commemorating AIK's history and its late arena.

One of the tattoos on AIK's Facebook page that received a lot of praise and attention was accompanied by a list of inked elements¹⁰¹. These include:

- AIK's crest
- Black-and-yellow scarf
- A picture of a policeman from 1970s hitting a lying AIK supporter
- AIK-banner (going down the entire arm)
- Norra Stå ("Irriducibili Norra"-banner and supporters)
- Johan Mjällby (a footballer) kicking a ball
- The first, older crest
- STHLM-banner

One could say that there is a lot of history happening on only one arm.

97 In my PhD project I devote considerable space to the historical expressions of hatred around AIK.

98 Hagström, Johansson, Jurell, 2010 p. 137-147

99 See Herd, 2016

100 Baudrillard, 1993, p.107

101 Netnography, 2016

The history of the club is woven together with the history of supporters, their interaction with the authorities and includes a regional or even national context, having Stockholm as a reference. Those tattoos express a very intriguing mix of communicative and cultural memory, as put in terms coined and presented by Jan and Aleida Assmann. Jan Assmann argued that there is a communicative memory, which assumes personal contact and exchange among up to three generations, before it is turned into cultural memory, transmitted via traditions, texts, rituals.¹⁰²

The back of the gentleman shown above contains symbols that are older than that are 100 years, and also that were established in 2002. However, there is an ambiguity about communicative and cultural memory here. New generations of supporters can appear every year, no matter their actual age, which means that speed of memories becoming, potentially, cultural is rather different. Further, things that happen in 1891 might be better remembered than the matches in 2011, although the time difference would be 100 years. The seasonal continuity and formal structure of football makes it possible for events to overlap. The importance of matches and leagues can change rather quickly as one cannot ever be sure how a season is going to look like. Same applies to players.

The intertextual density of the field was also revealed in an interview. Håkan, commenting on the club's crest as a motive for a tattoo mentioned, that the older crest that had been used officially between 1891 and 1904 used to be popular, but nowadays the new crest was preferred. Still, apparently some liked getting a tattoo with the year of establishing AIK in the style of the old crest, but one has to know why it looks like that and what it means.¹⁰³ Thus, it is necessary for the onlooker, the reader, to decipher the meaning in the design and connect it to the particular history of the crest itself, not only to the club.¹⁰⁴

The complex historical narrative is tied here to personal encounters with the club and the events around it. Thus, the person's body can be seen as enchanted by markers of belonging and of proud history, but the skin also serves as canvas of performing a specific story that is composed from selected elements. An old gentleman from the 19th century is combined with a concrete structure from 1930s, and modern supporters. The threads of continuity are performed here by the skin, muscles and cells of an individual that incorporated himself into a grand narrative of AIK through a path leading from Isidor to flares and masked ultras.

¹⁰² Jan Assmann, 1988

¹⁰³ Interview with Håkan, 2016

¹⁰⁴ Wottron & Still, 1990, p.1-2 and p. 19.

Conclusions

In this article I problematize different creative expressions of historical engagement within the context of Swedish club football. Although dealing with various elements from the past, these creations aim at restaging the present by framing it historically. A tifo or a tattoo is dramatically different from traditional written sources but their function is rather similar – to stage collective affiliation through personal narratives. The tifo marks the club's greatness through key historical figures, and the tattoo of an individual restates collective memory within the club. Further, although in a sense those sources are rather ephemeral, they are also highly visual and evocative and gain power through the digital footprint supporters are able to get via social media.

History here is assembled at wish and presented in diverse forms. However, it is important to provide the context of the display. A seemingly stable and well-grounded entity such as a football club is very vulnerable to ever-occurring changes and problems. Stadiums disappear, social factors change, people involved come and go, and that includes fans, players and those working for the clubs. The examples presented in this article can be viewed as attempts to create a coherent storyline within the context of almost constant crisis.

Further, the history of a club can be told through different sources. It can be a group of fans putting an organization together and attracting enough attention that it would become a valid reference in the club's narrative. The history can be expressed through meaningful individuals that owned their greatness to AIK and at the same time created the club's most cherished moments. Finally, it can be a story of an individual who dedicates his own body to narrating, albeit selective, one hundred years of commitment, pain and glory.

Because the structure of this social context allows for many different artistic and creative engagements, the expressions can be very personal. Thus, there is an interplay of communicative and cultural memory. The special time frame that exists here, meaning seasonal structure and high change rate of those involved, disturbs the expected pattern of generational vs. cultural transmission in memories. The knowledge of the past is here based on individual expressions of narratives accumulated over a century and performed in different forms to serve pragmatic needs of the present. In other words, the historical writing expressed here uses the past to construct an image of the future to fit their specific purposes.¹⁰⁵

Aleida Assmann comments on death being 'the great democrat bestowing the same fate on everyone' while, in her own words fame, the glory bestowed on the few 'is the great selector, the filter that immortalizes the names of some and extinguishes those of others'¹⁰⁶. In the case of AIK football club it

¹⁰⁵ Glassie, 1995

¹⁰⁶ Aleida Assmann, 2011, p. 49

is the intersection of pragmatism, personal involvement and available forms of expression that makes certain symbols and individuals appear. The past makes a scaffolding used to construct individual identities through collective experiences while, at the same time, using individuals to strengthen it.

As Hayden White writes, 'When it is a matter of choosing among these alternative visions of history, the only grounds for preferring one over another are *moral* or *aesthetic* ones'¹⁰⁷. The choices given to football supporters are vast in terms of past events or characters, but also the means to carry them out. Further, the medium of transmitting history also affects it, and so a piece of skin or canvas alter ever so slightly the messages, making them properties of groups or individuals, kidnapping them a bit from the club and adding personal, active characteristics. This possibility could be viewed as one element that makes football such popular and engaging sport. History is not sanitized, but rather injected with new life.

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