The ‘teenage dad’ and ‘slum mums’ are just ‘certain people I know’: Counter hegemonic representations of the working / under class in the works of Morrissey.

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Introduction:

The “understandable preoccupation” with Morrissey’s sexuality has seen “other forms of social identity” which inform his body of work, particularly social class, being neglected to a certain extent (Coulter 2010:160). In this chapter I examine Morrissey’s representation of the working / underclass in an era where neo-liberalism and the ideology of personal responsibility have obtained a global hegemonic or dominant position. My particular interest in Morrissey’s creative work lies in wider sociological debates around the continuing relevance and representations of social class. This chapter will document how Morrissey has continuously dealt with the “hidden injuries of class” that characterise contemporary society (Coulter 2005:6). Ultimately, the chapter will demonstrate that Morrissey’s work presents a counter narrative / alternative lens with which to critically examine the hegemonic neo-liberal view of the working / underclass.

The fragmentation of class structure, neo-liberalism & the emergence of class disgust:

The ‘death of class’ debate (Pakulski & Waters 1996) occurred in conjunction with the emergence of a political rhetoric of inclusion, meritocracy, and social mobility, with terms like social exclusion and underclass replacing discussions centred on the working-class (Skeggs 2005:47 cited in Tyler 2008:20). This change occurred at a time when there was grave concern about the escalating polarization caused as a result of the “crisis of Keynesian economics”, and the ensuing “neoliberal reordering of public policy” (Hayward & Yar 2006:10). The emergence of the ‘New Right’ ideology of personal responsibility (Dixon and Hyde 2003:25) in the political doctrines of Thatcher and Regan was a major factor in the acceptance of neo-liberalism in public discourse. In the UK, Thatcher advocated individualism as the basis of what she styled the “Healthy Society”, where the vast majority of citizens are encouraged (and where necessary compelled) to accept responsibility for the provision of their own welfare, and to live with minimal reliance on the state
(Thatcher 1977:81 cited in George and Wilding 1985:23). One way in which this ‘New Right’ / neo-liberal ideology became part of popular discourse was through the use of the media, where neo-liberal policies favouring the ‘restructuring’ of the welfare state were aided by a ‘moral panic’ (Golding and Middleton 1982; Clarke and Newman 1997).

As part of this process neo-liberal individualistic ideologies inject myths into public discourse, which are constructed as ‘fact’. These myths stigmatise feckless members of the working-class as ‘undeserving’ of the assistance they receive (Lens 2002:144), consequently absolving the state, and the system of stratification resulting from global capitalism, of any responsibility (Edelman 1998:134). The discourse of the dominant ideology of individual responsibility (Lens 2002:137-138) is successfully communicated through key words like ‘welfare’, ‘dependency’ and ‘personal responsibility’. These words act as a cognitive prompt, framing the issues of social exclusion and poverty as individual problems, and function as a linguistic reference facilitating the general public in strengthening previously held beliefs about the causes of social exclusion and those who experience it (Edelman 1998, cited in Lens 2002:144). The construction of dependency and empowerment myths renders participation in the workforce as a ‘normal’ empowering process (Adair 2001b:461); stigmatising those who do not conform as deviant ‘others’ (Devereux 2003:127) who choose a life of welfare dependency, and are a resultant drain on wider society (Adair 2001a:161-162). I would argue that future generations may come to see our era as characterised by “newspeak… half-truths and lies” which were “used to justify policies… which are in opposition to established norms of morality… grounded in the dominant democratic ideology” (Hersh 2004:3).

While discourse about the underclass originally resulted from the pathologising of sections of the working-class in relation to “socially productive labour”, the contemporary underclass figure of the ‘chav’ is also pathologised in relation to patterns of consumption (Hayward & Yar 2006:10-11). In the context of fluctuating definitions of class, the denigration of the chav should be seen as an indicator of middle-class aspirations to re-define class confines (Tyler 2008:18). In this context middle-class representations of the chav serve to negatively stereotype them as reprehensible, shameful, and disgusting (Law 2006:28), in the process producing
approval for middle-class values, and maintaining the “symbolic order” (Skeggs 2005:970). Chavs have been constructed through reference to “crime, disease, drugs, and over-breeding”; are said to lack social skills or any form of work ethic, and live mainly on local authority housing estates (Law 2006:28). In essence they have been constructed as the antithesis of a respectable, peaceful and hard-working society and chav culture is seen as the root of all of societies ills rather than as “a symptom of extreme social polarisation and inequality” (Law 2006:28-29).

**Media representations of the working-class:**

The mass media could confront hegemonic beliefs about poverty and those who experience it (Carroll & Ratner, 1999 cited in Bullock et al. 2001:243), but most often the media controls the type of information that reaches the general public, shaping and / or limiting our social knowledge and the way in which we construct our social world (McCullough 2002:22; see Croteau and Hoynes 2000: 214-222 for a discussion on working class invisibility). Audiences have agency in decoding media messages (Hall 1999; Smith & Bell 2007: 82) but it’s important to note that audiences are limited in their capacity to assess the accuracy of the media they consume without direct personal experience or detailed information on any issue (Bullock et al. 2001:229-230).

The media thus operates as a powerful institution for the dissemination of ideologies and discourses (Devereux 2003: 103) which have been used to cultivate and shape national consciousness (Adair 2001b: 454) and construct the underclass as the ‘undeserving poor’ (Golding and Middleton 1982; Lens 2002:144; Bullock et al. 2001:229-230; Hayward & Yar 2006:11-12). Media portrayals of poverty are important as they impact on public opinion. If public attitudes are informed by inaccurate, ideological and stigmatising representations of the poor, then policies preferred by the public (and political elites) are unlikely to seek to tackle the structural causes of inequality (Clawson & Trice 2000:61). In essence, this works to ensure that the working / underclass are positioned in a top-down society created for them, and they are expected to involve themselves in that society under those prearranged social constructs (Woronzoff 2009).
Counter-hegemonic ideologies:
Although (media) discourses of ‘undeserving poor’ are hegemonic, it is important to
recognise that counter-hegemonic ideologies have also emerged, though these are far
fewer in number and don’t penetrate into popular discourse to a similar extent. In
essence a lack of access to the mechanisms of “symbolic production” has ensured
there have been limited occurrences [1] of sustained critiques of “middle-class
pretensions” (Skeggs 2005:975-976). In a society where the hegemonic discourse is
produced by the upper and middle-classes, the capacity to articulate a contradictory
narrative to the marginalized is aided by the ‘reach’ of popular music (Botta
2006:123).

Speaking early in his career Morrissey argued that “The Smiths create their world
and not many people do that” (The South Bank Show 1987). Morrissey’s work has
the ability to realise people and places in a believable manner, creating innovative
modalities to visualize them. He manages to do this through a process of layering
“textscapes”, “soundscapes” and “landscapes” into his work (Botta 2006:123).
Morrissey’s “textscapes” consist of the lyrics and song titles which refer to people
and places, while his “soundscape” is conveyed through the use of local dialect,
accent or sounds. Lastly, the “landscape” is portrayed through visual elements such
as his covers, posters, photographs, videos, and stage backdrops etc., which may
reflect a particular place, individual or way of life, often a valorised / iconic form of
(white) working-class identity (Botta 2006:123).

Characters in Morrissey’s lyrics are often people that are trapped in a humanity that is
imposed upon them (Woronzoff 2009). Yet, his work offers the opportunity for a
negotiated reading of such texts. Morrissey’s friend Linder states that as a result of the
ambiguity present in his work “you are never quite sure who he is singing to or who
he is singing about…so therefore whoever you are when you listen to the songs you
can interpret them to fit your life” (The South Bank Show 1987). Additionally, the
writer Zoe Williams believes that his music allows “you make the connection on your
own and having made the connection on your own gives you a sense of belonging, it
makes you think there is a common understanding between you and Morrissey”
(Salford Lad 2007). Thus a negotiated reading of his ‘scapes’ has the ability to turn
Morrissey’s music into an influential instrument for re-imagining people and places
and assemble alternative images of the working / underclass, which ultimately work their way around the planet (Botta 2006:123).

**A Proletarian Hero?**

Morrissey’s repertoire has consistently championed working-class values. In 1986 The Smiths played in Newcastle as part of the Red Wedge [2] tour and also played in the “From Manchester With Love” benefit gig to raise money for the 49 Liverpool councillors who were taken to court by the Conservative Government (Rogan 1992:243). He has argued “it was important to confront people… sometimes when you are from a working-class background you have to be overtly demonstrative in order to be heard and in order to get anywhere” (The South Bank Show 1987). But there are contradictions / paradoxes in Morrissey’s stance on class. For example, fandom typically involves levels of conspicuous consumption, and there is a strong argument that Morrissey deliberately exploits the commercial aspect of his representations of social class [3]. Yet in spite of this legitimate argument; and even though he is now obviously a wealthy individual, Morrissey is fiercely anti-establishment, has continued in his role as a raconteur of the marginalized, and in the process he remains a “proletarian hero to many of his fans” (Edwards 2006).

In essence Morrissey represents “the outsider, and the outsider is always political” [4] (Girls and Boys: Sex and British Pop 2008). This identity of a ‘political outsider’ in part comes from his formative experiences. He was the younger child of an Irish immigrant family in Manchester, yet he was also the self-educated son of an assistant librarian, spending several of those formative years in a moderately well to do suburb. These autobiographical strains permeate his work in various ways (Coulter 2010:165) and one explanation for his conflicting mix of upper-class articulation and working-class absorption, Northern values and “Little Englander” identity is his inability to fit in anywhere (Kallioniemi 1999:308).

Speaking of his childhood he commented “I can simply remember being in very dark streets, penniless” (cited in Pye, 1984). His formative experiences served as a vital source of inspiration for him, which he acknowledged in an early interview. “It was absolutely crucial to me, absolutely crucial, to go through those things and grasp the realities of life, which so very few people seem to manage” (cited in Pye, 1984).
Morrissey’s experience of secondary school would also serve to instil a sense of class consciousness in him. He recalled

“It was a very deprived school... total disinterest thrust on the pupils, the absolute belief that when you left you would just go down and down and down…. There was no question of getting GCSEs... never mind a degree in science or something! It was just, ‘All you boys are hopeless cases so get used to it’ ” (cited in Pye, 1984).

It is little wonder then that Morrissey remembers his youth as being characterised by feelings of isolation, and marginalisation (Woronzoff 2009). Accordingly, I would argue that Morrissey’s upbringing ultimately instilled in him a desire to question the social and political order through his artistic endeavour.

Early in his career Morrissey said “I want people to enjoy the music and also to think about what’s being said” (cited in Worrall, 1983). Yet he has always been acutely aware that barriers exist which restrict his ability to do just that, as not only is society “dedicated to the class system… it's rife throughout the music industry” (cited in Pye, 1984). To be a ‘successful’ artist means blindly conforming to hegemonic discourses and ideologies and certainly not questioning the validity of the status quo (Edwards 2006). In addressing this necessity to conform, Morrissey said “it’s easy to get in line all the time and to please everyone, to please the media…. But I can’t do that” (The Culture Show 2006). Accordingly, he spits venom at contemporary pop stars and the music industry in general in ‘The World is Full of Crashing Bores’. He reminds us that

“It's just more lock jawed pop stars,  
Thicker than pig shit, nothing to convey,  
They're so scared to show intelligence,  
It might smear their lovely career,  
This world, I am afraid, is designed for crashing bores,  
I am not one”.

Such views are unlikely to gain Morrissey many admirers in the Establishment. But Morrissey’s lyrics strive to create an alternative cultural text, which documents working-class life; in doing so he re-contextualises class and challenges the hegemonic neo-liberal political ideology. He might not make much difference in practical terms but “if people can discover literature though pop music then why not politics? Sometimes a seed needs only to be sown” (Pye 1984).
Re-imagining people & places.

The UK Conservative Party (in reality New Right and staunchly neo-liberal) governments of the 1980s attacked organised Labour, stressed personal responsibility, and depoliticised the working-class [5], in the process presenting them as merely “a phenomenon of culture” (Zuberi 2001:21). Thus “commercial popular-cultural memory” has a vital role to play in how working-class identity is “contested and negotiated” (Zuberi 2001:21).

Thematically, Morrissey’s catalogue demonstrates veneration for a simpler way of life (Arellano 2002). Much of this representation is his nostalgic remembering of an imagined working-class world. He stimulates a communal recollection of the proletarian, white English working-class past, often in contradictory ways (Zuberi 2001:20), conveying to us a world of the unemployed and the work-shy, usually from the perspective of an outsider trying to fit in. He articulates feelings of alienation and anomie, yet his ability / desire to acknowledge and discuss those lived realities (which are largely absent in mainstream popular culture) offer one explanation for his global appeal (Devereux 2009:105-115). Morrissey’s appeal to his Latino fans for example may lie in the fact that he provides a public voice which acknowledges “the injustices of a social order that confines them to the margin” and allows them the possibility of escape from “the limited identity options entrenched in peripheral, working - and middle-class culture” (Snowsell cited in Arellano 2002). In essence, these Latino fans from a “community who were seen as an underclass in the United States” seem to have found “a kindred spirit in this Northern proletarian hero” (Salford Lad 2007).

As the rest of this chapter will demonstrate, Morrissey continues to produce songs that critique a highly unequal and highly ideological political doctrine, which has achieved an un-questioned global hegemonic position. These acts of rebellion (no matter how small), which re-imagine people and places, serve to challenge the dominant neo-liberal discourse of the ‘pathological’ working / underclass. In essence they should be seen as “the expression of a…political sensibility… that is appalled at living in a society that venerates the few while seeking to humiliate the many” (Coulter 2010:168).
**The de-industrialisation of the North of England:**

“When you’re Northern, you’re Northern for ever. You’re instilled with a certain feel for life that you can’t get rid of” (Morrissey on *Later with Jools Holland* 2004).

Morrissey’s representation of the working / underclass can initially be understood in the context of the de-industrialisation of the North of England (Kallioniemi 1999:312), particularly during Thatcher’s period in power. Thatcher’s programme incorporated a free-market economy, privatisation of state-owned industries, lower direct taxation, and retracting the welfare state (Bhattacharyya 2002:63). The destruction of the traditional working-class industries in the North of England was a consequence of her governments economic policies, policies which were concerned with preserving the “relative advantage of one section of capital, explicitly political, and intended to destroy the capacity of the organised trade union movement in its citadels of power” (Byrne 1999:65). Thatcher’s policies “threatened to amputate the welfare state from the body politic” and encouraged a growing reliance on Victorian values and service provision. Her radical market driven policies saw unemployment rates hit 3 million in 1981 (Rogan 1992:132-133). In reality the situation in the North of England could be said to have resulted from “a prejudice against a region dominated by working-class problems” (Singer 2007:407-409) and the decline of heavy industry which saw the North increasingly associated with bleakness, coldness, decay, social problems, working-class exploitation and a lack of hope [6] (Schmid 2007:349; Tonnies 2007:305).

Manchester was an urban wasteland by the late 1970s, characterised by derelict factories, boarded up warehouses and deserted office blocks [7]. But Morrissey was intent on renovating the dreary Mancunian landscape through his art (Pordzik 2007:330-331) and took on the mantle of representing the downtrodden working-class in Thatcher’s Britain (O’Donovan 2007). Morrissey’s writing “epitomises the overlaying of individual messages with a broad variety of divergent bits of texts and meaning bearing patterns adapted from different realms of creative thought” (Pordzik 2007:327; see also Brett’s chapter in this volume). He successfully ‘photographs’ the decline of the North, turning the landscape into “a poetic mirror for existential desolation and class resentments” (Zuberi 2001:35-36). In this sense Morrissey’s work constructs “representational spaces which overlay the actual physical space”,

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and in the process transmits a strong social condemnation of Thatcherite Britain (Tonnies 2007:307-314; see Brooker 2010 for an interesting discussion of The Smiths / Morrissey and Thatcherism).

The music of The Smiths made reference to “iron bridges”, “disused railway lines” and “cemetery gates” (Botta 2006:124) and the band were photographed posing in front of factories, smokestacks, cobbled streets and red-brick terraced houses, which have been a part of how people see Manchester going back to the descriptions of Engels [8] and Dickens (Shields 1991 and Moretti 1998 cited in Botta 2006:123-124). An iconic image saw The Smiths photographed outside Salford Lads Club on Coronation Street [9] for the inside gatefold of “The Queen is Dead”, while the video for ‘Stop me if you think that you’ve heard this one before’ saw Morrissey and a number of his ‘fans’ travelling through the streets of Manchester and Salford. Morrissey looks longingly at boarded up terraced houses, and shop fronts with traditional North of England surnames, in the process attempting to take ownership of the now desolate working-class landscape (Zuberi 2001:48). In essence, The Smiths gave expression to the vacant and crumbling “temples of capitalism”, vividly illustrating that when the capitalist economy goes through a period of ‘adjustment’, unemployment rises and whole neighbourhoods are left in need of physical and social regeneration (Botta 2006:124).

In 1987 the ‘Iron Lady’ argued that “there is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families. And people must look to themselves first. It's our duty to look after ourselves... People have got the entitlements too much in mind” (Thatcher 1987). The dissemination and subsequent general acceptance of such discourse was central to the ‘successes’ of Thatcher’s neo-liberal agenda. In a perverted version of Thatcher’s views on society, a good number of the pictures in British photographer Paul Graham’s book ‘Beyond Caring’ suggest that a feeling for the needs of others was a luxury that people could no longer afford in Thatcherite Britain (Tonnies 2007:309-310). Morrissey however, refused to accept such discourse and was particularly outspoken regarding the agenda of the Thatcher administration. His abhorrence of the woman and what she represented were obvious. In an interview in 1984 he stated that the “only thing that could possibly save British politics would be Margaret Thatcher's assassin” and the “sorrow of the Brighton bombing … is that she (Thatcher) escaped unscathed” (cited in Pye 1984). Morrissey
also used his musical cannon to bombard his nemesis and four years after he lamented the inability of the IRA to assassinate her, Morrissey called on the “kind people” of the UK to do the job instead. ‘Margaret on the Guillotine’, the final track on his debut solo album ‘Viva Hate’ was an obvious protests against Thatcherism. Morrissey sang of the “the kind people” having a wonderful dream of Margaret on the guillotine and he implored his listeners not to “shelter this dream” but rather to “make the dream real”. In doing so he signalled his intent to ensure that his solo career would continue to express his disgruntlement with the neo-liberal state and its resulting inequalities, in the same manner that the music of The Smiths had.

*The community of the working-class:*

Thatcher guaranteed working-class voters upward mobility if they deserted the trade union movement and the Labour Party, which she argued were full of obsolete principles (Zuberi 2001:40-41) Many observers at that time spoke of “the working class disappearing through a process of embourgoisement”, yet in reality the implementation of Thatcher’s policies created enormous unemployment and a new ‘underclass’ (Zuberi 2001:40-41). In spite of this, her ‘guarantee’ resulted in even the disaffected voting for the Conservatives, and Thatcher’s party were returned to power time and time again [10].

Morrissey’s catalogue is littered with references to the community of the working-class and he refers to various working-class locations throughout England. He has an uncanny ability to write songs which reflect his understanding of white, Northern, English, working-class life, an understanding which presents an evocative view of working-class communities (Devereux 2009:115; Zuberi 2003:540) and a disappearing Manchester (Pordzik 2007:335). In the 1960s, Manchester and Salford implemented a slum clearance project which sought to move residents to more modern housing estates, in the process destroying an entire way of life which was cherished by the likes of Morrissey and the artist L.S. Lowry (Schmid 2007:357). Morrissey vocalised the impact of the destruction of this way of life when he stated “most of the houses I grew up in were demolished and most of the schools I attended…strong working-class communities were completely eradicated…it was almost like a political movement to completely squash the body of people” (The South Bank Show 1987). “The place where I grew up no longer exists apart from here
in the local history library, photographic evidence… in a way it was like having ones childhood wiped away…..I feel great anger, I feel great sadness. It’s like a complete loss of childhood” (Oxford Road Show 1985).

It is hardly surprising then that Morrissey’s lyrics fêted that disappearing Northern working-class identity, portraying a world characterised by kindliness, community and humility which he believed had finally been obliterated by the policies of successive Thatcher governments (see Coulter 2010:161). In doing so, his reminiscence and criticisms of modernity emphasize “authenticity” and particularly working-class simplicity (Cloonan 1997:58-65 cited in Baxter-Moore 2006:148). Morrissey’s lyrics vibrantly deal with the manifold “hidden injuries of class”, disaffection, indignities, and humiliations that are indisputable characteristics of neo-liberal capitalist society. The Smiths produced a “cultural politics” which illustrated that there are multiple social realities and class is entirely central to them all (Coulter 2005:5-6). This process continued in Morrissey’s solo career [11].

His ‘outsider’ understanding of working-class tensions is honestly addressed in ‘On the Streets I Ran’ where Morrissey delves into the subliminal attitudes of the people on those streets. In ‘Ordinary Boys’ Morrissey sees working-class people as being “happy knowing nothing. Happy being no-one but themselves”. In spite of them having such monotonous, thankless lives, he believes they are content with their existence because they know nothing better. This is in direct contrast to the feelings of indecision and anxiety that the narrator (Morrissey) feels, so he appears genuinely envious of them. Even his decision to record The Jam song ‘That’s Entertainment’ is significant, as it describes the dire conditions of working / underclass life. Morrissey often doesn’t appear to foresee a future which is anything other than the inevitable product of contemporary forces, which makes the present so hard to bear for certain groups. In such a situation, the past becomes even more appealing (Baxter - Moore 2006:156) and may further explain the nostalgic longing for his valorised community of the Northern English white working-class.
Celebrating working-class hardness, idleness, criminality and social indifference:
In Morrissey’s solo career, many of his tracks celebrate working-class hardness, idleness, criminality and social indifference (Botta 2006:124). His descriptions imply “a gay viewpoint” on some occasions and “a straight viewpoint” on others, but “every instance is fraught with ambiguity” (Hubbs 1996:269; see also Stringer 1992; Simpson 2004). Morrissey’s sexuality is vague and open to elucidation (Brown 1991) and his fascination with hard working-class males in particular can be read as homoerotic attraction. Indeed, reading this fascination with working-class hardness from a Queer Theory perspective might well see these characters as ‘rough trade’ (Sheppard 2003).

Hubbs (1996:285) argues that Morrissey “chooses to explore queer themes, in the most knowledgeable ‘inside’ of queer-insider language”, and while the message is delivered in an ambiguous manner it “is abundantly meaningful to other insiders: for queer listeners, Morrissey’s work is about queer erotics and experience”. However, Hubbs (1996:285) acknowledges that she knows many “straight fans” who have no idea that Morrissey’s work has anything to do with “queerness”. Such a viewpoint is easily accounted for given mainstream society’s “ignorance of queer codes”, and the impact of “the economy of compulsory heterosexuality”. I am in agreement with Hubbs (1996:288) assertion that those who ignore “the relevant codes and secret languages” are missing “a crucial part of the picture”, but to simply restrictively classify Morrissey’s work as a form of “gay rock” is to miss the point entirely. As such Morrissey’s fascination with working-class hardness should also be seen as identification with the marginalized other (Zuberi 2001:51). Coulter (2010:166) suggests that Morrissey’s “gaze” on hard working-class males could also be “the result of another form of envy or desire”, one that suspects that these characters are “in some way authentically working class in a way that he can never possibly be”. It is that understanding that informs the next section of this chapter.

There are multiple ways of being a working class male, there is however a dominant hegemonic form of masculinity, which defines (a stereotypical version of) what it is to be a man (Coulter 2010:166). In post-war Britain, manufacturing jobs presented opportunities for (predominantly white) working-class males, yet this form of employment also accumulated a particular type of masculine “body capital” (Nayak
With industrial decline, working-class youths had to negotiate a now uncertain transition to manhood via government training schemes or the dole [12] (Bates, 1984 cited in Nayak 2006:814), in the process underpinning the class society (Beck 1998:35 cited in Nayak 2006:814), which in turn detrimentally impacted on their masculine identity (Nayak 2006:816). Yet “real and symbolic acts of violence” offered young working-class males the prospect of maintaining their ‘tough’ masculine identity (McDowell 2002 cited in Nayak 2006:821). These young males began to adapt to the social inequalities they faced by performing an unrepentant “posture of survival” that was hard and street-wise, in order to demonstrate a survivalist response to the neo-liberal ‘reforms’ that left many of their communities completely abandoned (MacDonald, 1999 cited in Nayak 2006: 826-827). The importance of place, locality and regional identities cannot be underestimated, and in spite of major physical and economic regeneration, the traditional working-class culture / identity of these young males steadfastly refuses to be erased (Nayak 2006: 828). In such a context Morrissey’s work makes extremely interesting reading.

‘Reader Meets Author’ [13] sees Morrissey castigate middle-class fascination with the working-class (Zuberi 2001:60). The parachute journalist in this track writes their stories from afar (safety) without ever understanding what it means to live in such locations. Morrissey sees his work as providing a more authentic view of working-class life, though from the perspective of an outsider who never really fitted into that way of life. Songs such as ‘Dial a Cliché’, ‘He Cried’, and ‘Certain People I know’ illustrate Morrissey’s fascination with working-class hardness. Additionally, his ‘Rusholme ruffians’, ‘sweet and tender hooligan(s)’, ‘Suedehead’(s), and skinheads, can all be seen as part of his “reclamation of the working class” (Zuberi 2001:52; see Bakers’ chapter in this volume).

‘We’ll let you know’ deals with English football hooligans, presenting them as tragic figures (Zuberi 2001). Morrissey sings “We're all smiles then, honest, I swear, it's the turnstiles that make us hostile”. He speaks of those involved descending “on anyone unable to defend themselves” and finishes by describing these individuals as the “last truly British people you will ever know”. Zuberi argues that this song therefore “evokes a hard line British nationalism” (Zuberi 2001:57). Yet there are alternative views about the origins and meaning of football hooliganism, and consequently
alternative ways of reading this particular song. I would argue that Morrissey illustrates hooliganism as a “practice rooted in a particular segment of class struggle” (Smith cited in Zuberi 2001:59). Ian Taylor (1971 cited in Frosdick and Marsh 2005:89) for example argues that the embourgeoisement of football was part of the disintegration of the time-honoured working-class weekend. Football hooliganism could therefore be understood as a response to the social alienation and lack of social supports experienced by working-class youths, the disintegration of the traditional working-class, and an effort to restate the traditional working-class weekend with its masculine, tribal characteristics (Frosdick and Marsh 2005:89; Piotrowski, 2006).

Morrissey has worn a West Ham United Football Club T-shirt on stage on a number of occasions [14], and West Ham hooligans (the Inter City Firm – hereafter ICF), were one of the biggest and most feared hooligan groups in the UK. The members of that group claimed to only fight with other hooligan firms, and the values fêted by the ICF echo the dominant values of East-End working-class culture, specifically a strong “in-group solidarity” and an intense suspicion of representatives of the Establishment (Spaj 2006). This solidarity was illustrated by one ICF member who stated “we pride ourselves in sticking together no matter what happens. We look after one another”. Furthermore, although the majority of hooligans were white males, a number of the ICF’s core members were black (Cass Pennant for example) or from other minority ethnic groups (Spaaij 2006). Finally, it is noteworthy that contrary to the image of explicit racism linked with hooligan firms throughout the 1970s and 1980s, only a minute fraction of ICF members were ever connected to Far-Right organisations such as the National Front, BNP or Combat 18; in fact there are instances where ICF members fought on behalf of the Socialist Workers Party against supporters of the National Front (Dunning et al. 1988:182). As such, rather than presenting a hard line, right wing British nationalism, the “last truly British people you will ever know” could be interpreted as referring to the decline of working-class culture and the reaction of some groups trying to halt that process.

Morrissey’s work also addresses the issue of idleness / fecklessness among the working / underclass. ‘Nobody Loves Us’ gives voice to how society at large views such individuals. Yet Morrissey venerates such idleness. ‘Still Ill’ and ‘You’ve Got Everything Now’ are absolutely derisive in their anti-work stance (Rogan 1992:190)
and ‘Heaven knows I’m miserable now’ contends that getting a job is no guarantee of contentment (Zuberi 2001:33). In reply to the disparaging resentment of mainstream society Morrissey offers a defence of the poverty stricken, methadone using, ‘Teenage Dad on His Estate’. He implies that the dominant view of the underclass is in reality an ill informed opinion obtained through the media, (“You defer to the views of the television news, Let someone do your thinking for you, and you still buy a daily newspaper and you find everything there - but the news”) which fuels the jealous derision (“you can’t help feeling used and you hate the teenage dad on his estate because he’s poor But he’s happier than you”) of discontented and alienated members of the middle-classes. This theme of jealousy is also evident in Morissey’s discussion of the ‘Boy Racer’ where he states “He's just too good-natured and he's got too much money and he's got too many girlfriends, I'm jealous, that's all”.

Furthermore, Morrissey deals with criminality in an alternative way. Crime as a shortcut to celebrity is the focus of ‘The Last of the Famous International Playboys’, a song that is an analysis of twisted morals (Garrett 2006). Morrissey intones

“Dear hero imprisoned...
And now in my cell (well, I followed you)...
Reggie Kray - do you know my name?....
Ronnie Kray - do you know my face?”

It could be argued that Morrissey is not only associating himself with the Kray twins, he is also re-contextualising them, presenting them as more than just gangsters and murderers. Clark et al. (1975:100) for example recognize the Kray twins as constituent elements of an exceedingly differentiated criminal subculture that existed in the East End of London, which was in fact part of the ‘normal’ existence and culture of the East End working-classes (see also Cope’s chapter in this volume). Alternatively, the song can be read as Morrissey criticising the media's glamorisation of individuals such as the Krays, Ronnie Biggs etc; a glamorisation which in turn encourages people to emulate them, (“in our lifetime those who kill, the news world hands them stardom, and these are the ways on which I was raised …. I never wanted to kill, I am not naturally evil, Such things I do just to make myself more attractive to you”) but which ultimately results in ruined lives.
Morrissey further exhibits his gallery of ‘loveable’ rogues in the ‘First of the Gang to Die’ where he discusses Latino gangs in LA. He again presents the subject matter in an alternative manner, where the main character Hector, (despite being someone who “stole from the rich and the poor and the not-very-rich and the very poor”) is given iconic status (“he stole all hearts away”) as he was the “first of the gang with a gun in his hand, and the first to do time, the first of the gang to die”. Yet Morrissey tries to show the futilities of that way of life when describing Hector as “such a silly boy”.

‘Ganglord’ continues this theme but from the perspective that the actions and attitudes of the police drive the narrator into the arms of the ‘Ganglord’. Morrissey sings of how the police are “haunting me, taunting me, wanting me to break their laws… And I'm turning to you to save me... They say “to protect and to serve” but what they really want to say is “Get back to the ghetto!” Morrissey appears to be promoting the idea that the police see the narrator (and his kind) as working / underclass ghetto-dwellers, and by extension he appears to be stating that if you come from such a background the police will never respect or protect you. “To protect and to serve” is the motto of the Los Angeles Police Department, yet here “To Protect and Serve” is conveyed as “To Harass and Dominate”, where defending the peace is dependant on the narrator becoming subservient to the police officers instructions and compliant “to the boot of his enforcement” (SARTRE 2003). While the song appears to be directed at the LAPD’s treatment of Latino immigrants it is ambiguous enough to apply to any location, for example it could just as easily be read and understood by those who have experienced the actions and attitudes of the police in Gare du Nord train station in Paris in the aftermath of the riots that took place in its poor, mainly immigrant suburbs in 2005.

Morrissey’s glamorous, exalted and alternative representation of those engaged in criminality, serves to set such criminal subculture elements of the working / underclass apart from the dominant understanding of crime; in the process building a counter hegemonic discourse and image of those who engage in such behaviour.

*Attacking neo-liberal discourse:*
Morris (1994:80) identifies two general theoretical or ideological positions with respect to the socially excluded (who have been constructed by governments and
dominant discourse as an 'underclass'). The cultural position sees the source of social exclusion as lying in the attitudes and behaviour of the underclass itself, while the structural position sees it lying in the structured inequality of the labour market and the state, which disadvantages particular groups in society. For those who accept the cultural version of this discourse, the way to bring about social inclusion is by ‘fixing’ the individual failings with which the excluded are afflicted. Proponents of the ‘stronger’ form of the discourse stress the role of those elites who are allowing this exclusion to take place, and seek solutions, which address the structural aspect of exclusion (Veit-Wilson 1998:45). It is apparent that most discourse and public policy on the subject tends to be of the cultural variety and the excluded are therefore perceived as having personal deficits (Byrne 1999:128). In current political debate the Moral Underclass Discourse (a variant of the weak definition of social exclusion) stresses ‘moral’ and ‘cultural’ sources of poverty and exclusion, and is thus primarily obsessed with the ‘moral hazard’ of welfare dependency (Levitas 2000:360). This discourse reaffirms long existent themes about dangerous classes (see Skeggs, 1997) stressing the moral and cultural weaknesses of certain groups such as lone parents and the long term unemployed (Levitas 2000:360). The Moral Underclass discourse is concerned with blaming the excluded for the situation they find themselves in and conveniently ignores the structural causes of exclusion which predominate in the current neo-liberal era. “One hears about ‘the marginalized’ and the ‘socially excluded’, but there is little discussion on who is excluding or marginalizing them” (Allen 2000:37).

Morrissey tackles that very subject in ‘Interesting Drug’, which examines social exploitation, moral deceit, and an unaccommodating state (Garrett 2006), in the process adopting a structural position (Morris 1994) on social exclusion and reaffirming his concern for society’s outcasts and dispossessed. He sings about being on “a government scheme designed to kill your dream”. In doing so he draws attention to the immorality of the neo-liberal state, which denies certain people an equal chance in life. In the songs’ video there are additional references, with the pupils for example clearly writing “There are some bad people on the Right” on the wall, and the lead actress carries a placard which states “Unfairly Dismissed”. In such circumstances Morrissey intones “Once poor, always poor, you wonder why we’re only half-ashamed... Look around ...can you blame us?”
This song may have been an attack on the social and economic policies of Thatcher’s Britain, yet the subject matter remains as relevant now as it was then, and Morrissey could just as easily be singing about the situation in contemporary Ireland or elsewhere. The mass availability of cheap credit combined with certain sections of the media continually promoting the mantra that people must buy immediately or run the risk of never being able to buy a home stimulated a property bubble, and young people were encouraged to avail of 30 and 40 year mortgages in order to buy houses (Allen 2009:107-122). As a result, many of those managing to purchase houses in a massively inflated market are now crippled with colossal debt repayments and negative equity (Allen 2000:180-185). Therefore, I am certain that the line “young married couple in debt ever felt had?” will resonate with many people.

The US administration’s multibillion dollar bail out of its financial institutions has debunked the neo-liberal myth that capitalists are independent risk taking wealth creators, which was the main justification for inequality. In fact, those who previously supported such risk taking became fervent supporters of ‘corporate welfare’ almost overnight (Allen 2009:63-64). Accordingly, the response to the current global economic crisis has concentrated on restoring ‘order’ to public finances, with government mantra declaring that excessive resources are exhausted by the poor through social welfare for example (Allen 2009:5-7). Simultaneously we have seen money required for the provision of vital public services being diverted to ‘recapitalise’ the near bankrupt banking system. In such circumstances people are entitled to wonder why financial institutions are deemed to be more important than ordinary people. Once more Morrissey appears to have captured the answer that many people might offer to this question when he sings “they're saving their own skins by ruining people’s lives”.

It is interesting that in the UK, New Labour was far more enthusiastic about the neo-liberal agenda (particularly the privatisation of core public services) than even Thatcher dared to be (Byrne 2005:56) [15]. In this regard Morrissey signaled his continuing hostility to neo-liberal policies with the lines “I’ve been dreaming of a time when the English are sick to death of Labour and Tories” in ‘Irish Blood, English Heart’. In ‘All you need is me’ he sings “I was a small fat child in a welfare house, there was only one thing I ever dreamed about and fate has just handed it to me,
whoopee”. He is effectively describing Happenstance; where fate rather than any state policy or intervention is responsible for an improvement in the narrators’ circumstances. In the process Morrissey directly challenges the meritocratic ideology / discourse which has camouflaged the perpetuation of privilege in neo-liberal states.

While public discourse attributes agency to those who participate in the labour force, it ignores the integral role of the structural, social and political forces in determining their employment status (Lens 2002:140). Welfare recipients have become scorned (Adair 2001b:455), with discourses reflecting their construction as a liability to the ‘decency’ of the ‘deserving’ working members of our society (Adair 2005:823). Morrissey personally experienced such disdain. Having quit from a Civil Service job after two weeks, he returned to the welfare office to be told by a DHSS officer that “People like you make me sick” (Rogan 1992:85). In view of that, it’s no surprise that Morrissey questions the role and influence that civil servants have on people’s lives in contemporary neo-liberal societies. In ‘Mama lay softly on the river bed’ he poignantly asks “Mama, who drove you to it? Was it the pigs in grey suits persecuting you? Uncivil servants unconcerned at how they frighten you?” While Morrissey’s lyrics are often deliberately ambiguous, making it difficult to identify the actual source of his scorn in ‘How can anybody possibly know how I feel’, I also read this track as a comment on the abuse of authority by those in positions of power within the apparatus of the state.

**Challenging Class Disgust:**

The use of the chav as a marker of class disgust is most evident through the construction of the chavette or “pramface” [16]; complete with hoopy earrings, tracksuit, ponytail (“Croydon facelift”) and multitude of mixed-race kids. She has been constructed as the archetypal sexually extreme lone mother who is an “immoral, filthy, ignorant, vulgar, tasteless, working-class whore” (Tyler 2008:26). Wilson and Huntington (2005:59) argue that a new set of feminine norms has emerged (where the idyllic life-course of middle-class women now conforms to the neo-liberal needs of the economy, via higher education and increased female participation in the labour market), resulting in the denigration of the chavette (Tyler 2008:30). When middle-class women delayed having children so as to participate in the labour-market, it
increasingly caused non-working (young) mothers (especially those on welfare) to be viewed as problematic. Essentially the chavette was stigmatised as a result of ‘normality’ being defined by “white middle-class cultural practices and family forms” (Griffin 1993:38 cited in Wilson & Huntington 2005:67).

The class disgust discourse on the chavette or ‘slum mum’ also conveniently allows governments to deflect attention away from cuts in welfare provision once they have framed the issue as an individualistic social problem (Skeggs 2005:968). Accordingly, concerns for teenage mothers are almost always articulated through the discourse of welfare dependency, the ideological basis of which is camouflaged (Wilson & Huntington 2005:62). Instead of framing such women’s poverty in terms of structural deficiencies (such as inadequate childcare, low levels of educational attainment, declining wages, less sustainable employment etc.), these women are most often depicted in a manner that ‘makes’ them responsible for their own misfortune. This is highly significant as a “political shift from redistribution to recognition politics” has occurred, and those who are not ‘respectable’ now cannot ‘morally’ seek assistance from the state (Skeggs 2005:977).

In this context the ‘Slum Mums’ which laments a colored lone mother's existence, powerfully critiques the impact of some of the myths which are continually advanced by neo-liberal governments through the Moral Underclass Discourse. The song begins with the sound of wailing children, before Morrissey adopts the role of the welfare officer to narrate this particular story. He sings from a patronising / superior position to the ‘Slum Mum’, questioning her audacity in trying to receive assistance from the state, “you turn to us for succour because you think we're just suckers”. His apparent glee while doing so is so vibrant, “We may be welfare, but we don't care and we’re paid to despise your council house eyes”, that it demonstrates the contempt and inhumanity that many people have for this group of the ‘undeserving’ underclass. In this context, signifiers such as accent, dress, and address etc. serve as markers which are decoded by welfare officers as signs that the individual is not to be trusted (see Power 2009). Morrissey sings “You can change your name and you can bleach your skin, camouflage your accent so that even you don't recognise it, but you won't escape from the slum mums because you are one, because you live and breathe like one”. The stereotypical view of the undeserving slum mums continues with reference to the
“six filthy children from six absent fathers”. The effect that this discourse has on the ability of such individuals to gain their rightful entitlements from both the state and its representatives (i.e.: the welfare officer) is portrayed in detail … “The office of the Social Service is strategically placed in a dowdy, rowdy part of town to discourage you from signing. We make you feel as if you're whining when you claim what's legally yours”.

The final verse of the song is the most disturbing. “Take you and your rat pack brood to the long grass of the meadow, administer seven doses lethal and illegal which may render you elsewhere”. Morrisey’s (in his role as the welfare officer) encouragement of the ‘Slum Mum's’ infanticide appears to suggest that she is better off killing her children so as to save them from the indignities of a life spent as a member of the underclass. In assuming the role of the taunter, as well as her potential liberator, Morrisey forces the audience to deal with our own prejudices (Rogan 1992:300). Accordingly a negotiated reading of these codes (Hall 1999) may evoke a more compassionate / understanding view of the ‘Slum Mums’ of this world.

Conclusions:

In conclusion, Morrisey’s body of work makes an important contribution to wider sociological debates around the continuing relevance and representations of social class. The Neo-liberal individualistic ideology of personal responsibility has framed the issues of social exclusion and poverty as individual problems (Lens 2002:137-144), facilitating an “abdication from acknowledging class relations” (Skeggs 2005:54), causing the identification of class discrimination, and the specificity of class cultures / identities / struggle to be suppressed (Tyler 2008:20).

Yet, Morrisey recognises that class is a central element of our social identity and his work demonstrates a shift from an objective to a subjective analysis of class, vividly illustrating the validity of Skeggs (1997) claim that the academic abandoning of class as a theoretical concept does’t mean it no longer exists. Morrissey challenges postmodern arguments that individualisation weakens class identities by reconfiguring class analysis, and centrally locating “issues of cultural identity” (Bottero 2004: 988), in the process demonstrating that individualisation has merely altered how class operates. Despite the fact that communal class identities are fragile, our subjective
identities continue to involve “relational comparisons” with those from other classes; signifying “the reforming of class cultures around individualized axes” (Savage, 2000: xii cited in Bottero 2004: 989). In such a context, by continuously using his work as a powerful tool for re-imagining people and places, Morrissey has built a counter hegemonic discourse and image of the working / underclass (Botta 2006:123). As such it would appear that Morrissey’s ‘Years of Refusal’ has been very well spent.

Notes:
1. The Royle Family (BBC) and Shameless (Channel 4) for example.

2. Red Wedge was a collective of British musicians who attempted to connect music fans with the Left wing policies of the UK Labour Party prior to the general election of 1987, with the intention being to remove Thatcher’s Conservative Party from government. There are some suggestions that Morrissey was ambivalent about Red Wedge, and that it was really Johnny Marr that pushed for the involvement of The Smiths in Red Wedge (see Devereux 2010:77).

3. See Devereux 2010:74 for a similar discussion in relation to Morrissey’s commercial exploitation of religion.

4. This assessment comes from Alice Nutter of the anarchist pop group Chumbawumba (The South Bank Show, 1987), a woman that was so radically political that she advocated theft, and urged fans of their music who couldn't afford to buy their CDs to steal them from large music chain stores in 1998 (Harris 1999:96).

5. Morrissey made reference to this ‘strategy’ on his 2004 tour when using a version of the “Imperfect List” by Big Hard Excellent Fish as an intro tape. This intro makes reference to “the Tory invention of the non-working-class…. fucking bastard Thatcher. …. racist… hunger…. greed…. overdraft like a mountain…. poll tax, commie bashers….the breakdown of the NHS… homelessness… and the all-American way”.

6. The North of England remains an area that is characterised by higher unemployment and lower wages, and by a higher crime and a lower economic activity rate (Singer 2007:407).

7. This is brilliantly captured on Grant Gee’s 2008 documentary film, Joy Division: Their own story in their own words.


9. Coronation Street has come to symbolise the archetypal Northern working-class street in popular consciousness (Zuberi 2001:36).

10. ‘Glamorous Glue’ refers to this trend. “We won't vote Conservative because we never have. Everyone lies, everyone lies”.

11. There are discernible differences in Morrissey’s representations of class over time. I would argue that in The Smiths he tends to focus on an objective analysis of class while as a solo artiste he concentrates more on how class location is bound up with social identity.

12. For many working-class males there was only a depressing choice between “shit jobs and govvy schemes” (Coffield et al. 1986:86 cited in Nayak 2006:814).
13. This track is reported to be about the journalist Julie Burchill.


15. David Cameron’s coalition government seem eager to continue this process.

16. See Lizzie Hopley’s (2005) play of the same name which portrays this construction of the chavette and denigration of the working-class as a form of social racism.

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