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PROOF

Part II

Urban Subcultures and Structures of Feeling

PROOF



4

The Sons and Heirs of Something Particular: The Smiths' Manchester Aesthetic, 1982–1987

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This chapter highlights continuities between the aesthetic evident in the songs and related material of the popular music group, The Smiths, in the 1980s and a Left-wing aesthetic found in a range of creative work produced in Manchester in the 1930s and up until the late 1950s. The Smiths brought unique properties to popular music in the wake of the emergence of a regional punk music scene in Manchester from 1976, and represent an ideal case study for the discursive and mythic construction of what I term the 'implied' place – Manchester – that has emerged through a series of representations of the city in popular culture. I engage Raymond Williams's concept of 'structure of feeling' as a theoretical way of understanding practices, experience and feelings that may be common in a specific community, such as in Manchester, or the Greater Manchester conurbation. I demonstrate that The Smiths' music was antithetical to the cosmetic 'New Pop' of 1983 and articulated an oppositional discourse to Thatcherism in which 'Manchester' was portrayed as a dystopian consequence of political oppression. The discursive agenda and the Manchester aesthetic in The Smiths' work is examined, and I demonstrate that their approach is a legacy of the political work in the agit-prop theatre of Ewan MacColl and Joan Littlewood. I then continue to observe a similar commitment to political expression of issues facing the working class in the work of BBC North Region radio under the directorship of A. E. Harding and the contributions Littlewood, MacColl and the documentarist Denis Mitchell made to this commitment. I conclude by noting textual continuities of this legacy in The Smiths' work.

The Smiths' time and town

The Smiths were very much of their time, which marked the 'end of an era', Mello suggests (2010: 135). The period in which they recorded and released records 'roughly corresponded' with Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's second term in office (1983–1987), as Brooker notes (2010: 22). Their time therefore coincided with the period in which the politics of the Thatcher government divided Britain, presiding over a formal end to the nation's industrial heritage and imposing new mythologies of privatisation, enterprise, individualism and authorised selfishness. Thatcherism was 'a particular way of managing the transition from production to consumption – Britain's old manufacturing base...to an economy of services and transactions', Brooker argues in the context of his analysis of The Smiths (2010: 31). The group articulated an oppositional position to such politics from within the field of popular music. Of their time, then, The Smiths were also very much of their town, Manchester, and were the sons and heirs of a heritage of left-wing creative production in that city and its surrounding townships, as examined below. The connections are firm between the political strife of the 1930s and that of the 1980s, when Thatcher dismantled the welfare state, and are relevant in the context of The Smiths' textual output. Raymond Williams's concept of 'structure of feeling' is useful here in consideration of the dynamic experience and representation of place. Taylor, Evans and Fraser, in their study of regional local difference between Manchester and Sheffield, heed Williams's observations about the taken-for-granted 'social practices' that must be thought of as connected practices, part of an 'ensemble' of social relations. These exert great power 'over individual belief' (Williams paraphrased, Taylor et al., 1996: 5). Williams referred to going 'beyond formally held and systematic beliefs' and considering 'meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt' and the variable 'relations between these and formal and systematic beliefs' (1977: 132). Taylor et al. suggest that this concept may be applied to the 'character' of cities, as they are, both, socially experienced and represented in folklore and media representation (1996: 6). With this in mind, I will now comment upon the constructed nature of media representations of Manchester and highlight problems in relation to the socio-geographical distribution of these representations.

The implied place: 'Manchester'

In the critical discourses attendant to the work and social and cultural effect of The Smiths, the tendency is to refer to Manchester as if it is a

place with an homogenous character: Halfacree and Kitchin write of ‘Manchester itself’ as they observe links between geography and ‘indie’ music (1996: 50); Simpson writes of the ‘damp, dank, melancholy’ town (2004: 34); Reynolds writes of the city’s ‘gloom and decay’ seeping ‘deep into the fabric’ of the sound of some of its 1970s bands (2005: 174); and Pordzik writes of Morrissey, ‘more than any of the other local “bards” or pop and punk celebrities’, demonstrating how to ‘really transform the drab Mancunian landscape into something more fertile in art’ (2007: 331). Such representations essentialise Manchester and foreground aspects of that city that have been portrayed in a series of high-profile media contexts: in films, literature, radio and television shows and in popular music. The Smiths’ work, and Morrissey’s lyrics in particular, re-use and capitalise on these. As Power notes, the music of The Smiths, their videos and their photographs reference the remains of industrial Manchester: arched and iron bridges, disused ‘factories, smokestacks’ and the ‘cobbled streets and red-brick terraced houses, which have been a part of how people see Manchester going back to the descriptions of Engels and Dickens’ (Power, 2011: 103).

This is a selective representation of ‘Manchester’. It is a process similar to that employed when dialect is used to represent northerners in popular media. This ‘not only demarcates an imagined community but also regulates the target group of consumers’, Ehland observes (2007: 22). The Smiths used and reworked clichéd images of Manchester and the North, and added extra dimension to them so that they were meaningful as ‘opposition’ to the ‘Thatcher rhetoric’ of their time (Brooker, 2010: 24). Bottà notes that popular music is able to ‘autonomously reshape place-images and representations’ through signifying processes of layering ‘textsapes’ (lyrics and song titles referring to people and places), of ‘soundscapes’ (the way a place shapes a band’s distinctive sound and also the use of local dialect, accent or city sounds) and of ‘landscapes’ (the ‘place connections’ in a band’s visual material – CD covers, posters, photographs, video, stage design and clothes) (2008: 288–289). Brooker refers to the ‘layered intertextuality of Morrissey’s heritage’ (2010: 36). However, ‘Manchester’ is not a fact in these representations, it is a rhetorical construction.

In the current geographical spread termed Greater Manchester, Manchester is a relatively long, thin strip of territory bordered by eight metropolitan boroughs – Bolton, Bury, Oldham, Rochdale, Stockport, Tameside, Trafford, Wigan – and the city of Salford. The latter has traditionally been Manchester’s poorer neighbour. In an early example of the self-deprecating humour featuring in representations of the area, nineteenth-century working-class Radical Samuel Bamford labelled the main

bridge linking the cities over the River Irwell as 'the Bridge of Tears', in an ironic comparison with Venice's Bridge of Sighs (quoted in Taylor, Evans and Fraser, 1996: 56). The (lack of) distinction between Manchester and Salford is problematic in interpretation of The Smiths' work, and that of other bands who may be commonly considered to be from 'Manchester'. Goddard and Halligan (2010: 11) talk of a 'splintering of the received histories, social and cultural' of the two cities (see also Hannon, 2010; Witts, 2010). For clarity in this chapter I suggest that the 'Manchester' referred to in discourses pertaining to and surrounding The Smiths' work, is an 'implied' place. This follows the work of Rimmon-Kenon, who noted that in the narrative communication model in novels, the 'implied author' and 'implied reader' are 'substitute agents' for the real author and reader. These agents are positioned in the process of the communication of the text as it is consumed by the real 'reader' (through whatever means: reading, watching or listening). For Rimmon-Kenon this act of substitution (of the real with the implied) is 'the source of norms embodied in the work' (1983: 86). Morrissey, and The Smiths, are implied authors as their discourse emerges through text(s): their discursive impact, their 'psychological complexity', are greater than that of the individuals who comprise the actual group (1983: 86). Thus, to use Chatman's theory of communication in fiction, these implied authors ('The Smiths') instruct us 'silently, through the design of the whole, with all the voices, by all the means' that they have 'chosen to let us learn' (Chatman, 1978: 148). In such a structure it follows that the 'Manchester' under discussion *in relation to* The Smiths' work is an implied place, constructed as their texts interact dialogically with an extensive range of discourses and media representations of that place. It is more than a mythological place (Barthes), or an imagined place (Anderson) because, in this context, it is brought into being as a subject through the work of The Smiths. For example, The Smiths made Salford Lads Club, on the real-life Coronation Street, iconic after it featured on the inside gatefold sleeve of their album *The Queen is Dead* (1986). Its Victorian façade, the fact that local film star Albert Finney attended the club as a boy, the insinuation of enforced masculine community, and the implication of gay bonding associated with the building's name in the context of its use as a Smiths image, all give the site intertextual resonance (Goddard, 2012: 373). However, the building is not *in* Manchester – it is in Salford. Still, it becomes part of the discursive construction of the implied place, 'Manchester'. Having, hopefully, made clear the distinction between the geographical fact of Manchester and the place of the same name that is produced in discourse, I signal the constructed nature of the latter

wherever possible in the analysis below or refer more accurately to the wider conurbation, Greater Manchester.

Vat of agit-prop, melody and self-culture

A key time politically in Britain, the period of The Smiths' inception was also a key time in the development of popular music and the media landscape. Punk impacted significantly. Its do-it-yourself ethos emboldened some young people, encouraging them towards enterprise. As with the democratising effect of skiffle in England in 1958, bands sprang up across the land and music-making and performance in the provinces were energised. By the early 1980s, young people who had a combined interest in music and fashion, and encouraged by the way dress was used in punk to signify subcultural values (Hebdidge, 1979), were gathering in locations where these tastes could be shared: Pips club in Manchester; the Rum Runner in Birmingham, and Billy's, Blitz and Le Beat Route in London. The 1970s 'were preparing their last gasp', Rimmer muses in relation to these developments (1985: 19), observing that 'New Pop' emerged as participants in club nights – many of whom had been involved in the punk scene – found an outlet for their artistic aspirations and formed bands (1985: 5).

In the first two years of the 1980s, binary oppositions became apparent in music in Britain. While 'indie' music (sometimes known as 'alternative') had flourished in the aftermath of punk, 'glossy disco and polished soul' with 'lavish high-tech production' were dominating the pop charts (Rimmer, 1985: 18). The lure of commercial success tempted some habitués of club nights who had adopted punk's do-it-yourself ethos to form bands. Hence, Spandau Ballet, Visage, Culture Club and Duran Duran arrived, bridging the gap between two previously 'opposing traditions – punk and disco' (Rimmer 1985: 23). Consequently, 'alternative' music could better define its own values, trumpeting a guitar-based authenticity promoted in opposition to New Pop, which often made use of synthesiser technology in the wake of its incursion through German electronic bands and American and Euro disco (see Reynolds, 2005: xxii; *Synth Britannia*). Binary oppositions thus became apparent between commercial and alternative music: fabricated/real; colourful/grey; major label/indie label; inauthentic/authentic.

The binary of South/North also became apparent as the result of the success in the alternative music field of a number of bands from the North (see Reynolds, 2005). In Greater Manchester, the role of a couple of gigs by The Sex Pistols at The Lesser Free Trade Hall in summer 1976

(on 4 June and 20 July) in fomenting a new local music scene is heavily mythologised. Scenes representing the event feature in the films *24 Hour Party People* (Winterbottom, 2002, a story mainly about Tony Wilson and his Manchester enterprise, Factory Records) and *Control* (Corbijn, 2007, a biopic of Joy Division's Ian Curtis) as well as in some television documentaries and in the considerable array of publications on the subject of the post-1976 Greater Manchester music scene. By late 1976 young local journalist/musician Paul Morley was able to report for the national *New Musical Express* on the 'hot new phenomenon' of a 'small series' of 'arranged' punk rock gigs in Greater Manchester (Morley, 1976). In 1977 the local group, Buzzcocks, gained a reputation for their celebrated independent EP single, *Spiral Scratch*, which seemed to epitomise the DIY spirit of punk. As Haslam observes, with some London punk bands now being signed to major labels, 'their rhetoric of anarchy and revolution' sounded hollow, but Buzzcocks demonstrated a productivity 'working outside the normal structures', hence adhering more to the original punk ethos (Haslam, 2000: 114). Buzzcocks sang of 'boredom' and of life as 'very humdrum' (*Boredom*) and they were at the forefront of a batch of bands from the area that began to gain the attention of the national rock press and specialist radio programmes such as John Peel. The most prominent of these, arguably, were Joy Division (formerly Warsaw), The Fall, Magazine (created by former Buzzcock Howard Devoto) and A Certain Ratio.

The emergence of these bands *suggested* an homogenous 'Manchester' scene, characterised by a bleak, realist aesthetic. Black and white photographs of Joy Division by Kevin Cummins for a January 1979 *New Musical Express* cover 'were key to framing the bleak intensity of the band's image', *The Telegraph* recently wrote (Lachno, 2014). One of the black and white photographs is on a snow-covered pedestrian bridge in Hulme, South Manchester, near where Morrissey once lived. The band is positioned in the background of the photo, with the foreground being a white expanse of snowy nothingness, in what Gatenby and Gill describe as an 'Un-Rock & Roll' picture (2011: 67). The image has connotations of a bleak East European city prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall, and Joy Division's music was influenced by David Bowie's 'Berlin period', when he was influenced by a number of German electronic bands, including Kraftwerk and Neu! (see Reynolds, 2005: xxi). The suicide of Joy Division's Ian Curtis in May 1980, and the poignancy of their single *Love Will Tear Us Apart*, which achieved chart success immediately afterwards, embedded the myth of 'Manchester' as an alternative music city distanced from London's hegemony. Thus it could be said that a

'Manchester' aesthetic was produced across a set of images and discourses in a particular time and among particular circumstances. This may be associated with the 'structure of feeling' that Williams writes of. Greater Manchester's physical environment is a legacy of the onslaught of the Industrial Revolution. However, the first industrial city 'had become one of the first to enter the post-industrial era', and images of dereliction and the disenfranchisement of its people in 'the dole-age' (*Some Girls are Bigger Than Others*, The Smiths, 1986) of spiralling unemployment had resonance at the onset of the 1980s (Reynolds, 2005: 174).

The Smiths associated the geographical reality of Greater Manchester, and the discursive domain of the implied place, 'Manchester', with a radical stance. In their work the 'rhetorical recourse to the North is insistent', Brooker observes (2010: 28). As Whiteley contests, their politicised lyrics locked into 'the social and cultural divide caused by Thatcherism', shaping 'Manchester' as a site of political opposition to that agenda and its privileging of south-east England (2010: 105). Simultaneously, their adherence to, and musical referencing of, the 'authentic' rock style of the 1950s and 1960s intertextually linked them to the '1960s counter-culture' (Whiteley, 2010: 105). This emphasised the polarity between the cosmetic New Pop and what Bannister terms the 'purity' of 'indie', or 'alternative', rock music in 1983 (2006: 87). The quality of The Smiths' northern music legitimated the latter while perpetuating the political discourse of the north/south divide in England. However, partly because of the new platforms opened for rock/pop music at the time – and, partly because of their initial minor chart success – The Smiths found themselves in autumn 1983 performing on television alongside New Pop acts.

By 1982 the pop video was becoming a significant medium in pop music. Coinciding with this, the opening of Channel Four Television in Britain provided a new and distinctive platform for music. The Smiths were profiled on Channel Four's *The Tube*, on 4 November 1983, 20 days before their first appearance on *Top of the Pops* – on both occasions they performed *This Charming Man* (1983). Highlighting the enclosed male world represented in the song, the latter appearance was described by David Stubbs in *Uncut* as 'an unexpectedly pivotal cultural event in the lives of a million English boys', and from this time. The Smiths' 'Manchester' aesthetic shapes itself as a national discourse (Stubbs, quoted in Goddard, 2004: 53). Morrissey eloquently observes it:

The groups from Punk's overflow continued to rabble-rouse in large armies, but The Smiths drew a line under the past with a detachment

that presented a confidential perspective, and one that would never snap. The vat of agit-prop, melody and self-culture all mish-mashed into a strong autonomous weapon that seemed on the face of it academic, yet appealed to heavily scarred jostlers. (2013: 151)

Despite this, their styling, performance and iconography ensured that they attracted the attention of the style-conscious: in the *Top of the Pops* performance Morrissey sported a fashionably exaggerated, retro 1950s quiff; Marr had a fringed haircut and wore clothes redolent of the English beat groups of the 1960s. Just before playing their first gig at the Hacienda in February 1983, Morrissey wielded a bunch of gladioli like a whip – flowers being employed, initially, ‘to kill off that 1982 Factory aesthetic, of concrete and steel’, Marr contends (Marr, quoted in Robb, 2010: 198). With the *Top of the Pops* appearance, however, they signified an otherness to the programme’s synthetic glamour and connoted a charged oppositional agenda amplified by Morrissey’s yelp in between verses. To consider the discursive impact of *This Charming Man* in these contexts: the song features multi-tracked guitars and is a musical hybridity that fuses elements of Motown, country, jazz and blues (Goddard, 2004: 52). However, the exceptional nature of The Smiths’ engagement with their world is signified in the lyrics of the song. These portray a scene in which a young man is stranded on a remote hillside, his bicycle tyre having suffered a puncture. It is implied that a man with considerable charm stops to help and that the two have sex on the seat of his tasteful car, as suggested by the lines, ‘Why pamper life’s complexity/ When the leather runs smooth on the passenger’s seat?’ (*This Charming Man*, The Smiths, 1983). Campbell and Coulter identify the ‘Rustic homoerotic desire’ that gives the song a ‘subversive potential’ (2010: 2). As they note, such ‘subversive aspects of the band... stretched far beyond the specific establishment objects of the vocalist’s ire and into a realm that was more specifically aesthetic’. Many of their songs ‘invite the listener beyond the constraints of the everyday’ and remind them that ‘another world is possible’ (2010: 6). To pamper life’s complexity, briefly, the thematic territory that the song shapes is a tension between nature and culture, but one compounded by the homoerotic aspect (see Marr, quoted in Robb, regarding The Smiths’ involvement in the Manchester gay scene, 2010: 199–200). A number of questions revolve around the line in the song, ‘Will nature make a man of me yet?’ (*This Charming Man*, The Smiths, 1983), and its relation to human pursuit: Is the protagonist seeking health through taking exercise in the country? Is it sex with another man that ensures that nature has taken its course? Is he

struggling to *become* a man? Or is it that he feels that he can only become a man by escaping the city? For the hillside is desolated in contrast to that which is not so: inhabited, cultured, city society. This is where the predatory, middle-class, cultivated charmer who helps the stranded boy hails from. He has been rewarded with sufficient capital to purchase an expensive car, his upward mobility ensuring that the contrastingly immobile boy is there for his taking. Given The Smiths' 'controversial elegy' to the victims of the Moors Murderers (*Suffer Little Children*, 1984) it is reasonable to associate the desolate hillside described in *This Charming Man* with the bleak Yorkshire and Derbyshire moorlands to the East of Manchester (Goddard, 2004: 79). Morrissey discursively articulates what may be labelled a 'Manchester' structure of feeling through the Moors Murders of the 1960s, as he writes in his autobiography:

A swarm of misery grips mid-60s Manchester as Hindley and Brady raise their faces to the camera and become known to us all; nineteenth-century street life right here and now, with 1970 but a spit away. It is factual Hindley and Brady, and not our spirited Lake poets or cosy tram-travelled novelists, who supply the unspoken and who take the travelling mind further than it ever ought to have gone, sealing modern Manchester as a place of Dickensian drear. Of Hindley and Brady there would be nothing to give you heart in their complicity, as children of the poor, who had lived short and shaky lives, were led away to their tortured deaths, and the social landscape of Manchester warps forever with further reason to cry. (Morrissey, 2013: 26–27)

The victims of the Moors Murderers were snatched in Greater Manchester. The children who return as ghosts on the moors are specifically children of the poor, urban working-classes of Ancoats, Longsight, Gorton, Ardwick (where Marr grew up) – all connected Victorian, inner city suburbs in east and south Manchester. These were considered slums by the 1960s, and were undergoing clearance by the City Council. One victim came from Ashton-under-Lyne, a Lancashire mill town six miles away. It is the manner in which the Moors Murders narrative maps onto the more complex discourses of class, through which such lives and their thwarted possibilities are more generally understood, that gives it its power as working-class history (Pleasance, 2011: 30). As in most of the other work of The Smiths, the writing, in Pordzik's terms, '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' (2007: 327). These politicised

lyrics exude 'attitude', Whiteley observes (2010: 105). This stance is informed, whether consciously, or unconsciously, by a tradition of political activism in theatre, music and radio broadcasting in Greater Manchester. I now illustrate the continuities that are evident between these and the work of The Smiths.

Taking radical theatre to the dirty old town

Academics have commented upon and analysed Morrissey's professed love of the 1961 film *A Taste of Honey* (Brooker, 2010; Goddard, 2004, 2012; Mello, 2010; Pordzik, 2007; Whitely, 2010). The film is an adaptation of a debut stage play of the same name by Shelagh Delaney, who wrote the piece as an 18-year-old Salford schoolgirl. Morrissey acknowledged Delaney as a muse; he also referred to her 'strange sexiness' and quoted from her work extensively in his lyrics (Goddard, 2012: 96–99). Like Morrissey and Marr (real surname Maher), Delaney was of Irish descent (see Campbell, 2010). The play was first staged in 1958 by Theatre Workshop, a left-wing theatre group which was then based in Stratford East, in London's East End (a run-down working-class area at that time). As Lacey writes, this was unlike 'any other theatre of the period':

The company arose out of the worker's theatre movement of the inter-war years, when its founders, Joan Littlewood and Ewan MacColl, ran a series of companies linked by a range of common concerns: a radical socialism, a commitment to performance for working class audiences, and a voracious appetite for a variety of theatrical influences and methods. (1995: 48)

The theatre companies that evolved into Theatre Workshop had their roots in Manchester (and Salford) where practitioners worked as political activists, theatre producers and performers, and as BBC radio performers and writers and, in MacColl's case, as a folk musician.

There is an initial and ostensible incongruity in a comparison between Morrissey and MacColl. The most obvious differences are the musical and generational ones. Additionally, some of MacColl's music is associated with a traditionally masculine world of (heroic) working-class labour, whereas Morrissey's representations of working-class life are more complex and ambiguous. The latter complicates the male position, as observed earlier, representing issues such as homosexuality, abuse and paedophilia (see Whiteley, 2010). There are similarities, however: Harper

writes that MacColl, like Morrissey, 'had an opinion on everything and regularly gave the press controversy on a plate' (2006: 31). He also 'made himself visible' and 'made himself the target', as Martin Carthy has noted, as The Smiths' frontman was inclined to do (quoted in Harper, 2006: 31). Further correspondence between MacColl's work, and that of The Smiths are now outlined.

'Minstrel of the working people'

Harker recalls that two thousand people attended a concert celebrating MacColl's seventieth birthday party in London in January 1985, during the forty-seventh week of Britain's 'bitterest industrial dispute since the General Strike' (2007: 1). He notes:

Mass unemployment; protracted industrial dispute; barricaded communities; running battles between militant workers and the forces of state; the 1980s seemed like a replay of the 1930s that had shaped him [MacColl]. He felt that recent history had vindicated his unswerving political beliefs. (2007: 3)

MacColl was born in Salford in 1915 into a working-class immigrant Scottish family. Like Morrissey he engrossed himself in literature as a teenager (in Salford and central Manchester libraries) in preference to the conformity and subservience of regular employment (Harker, 2007: 36). Speaking about being unemployed upon leaving school in 1929, MacColl wrote: '[s]ince you have entered this grown-up world where nobody seems to want you or need you, you have come to regard books as your best friends, your only friends' (MacColl, 1990: 36). His reading helped him express his individuality through creative production. 'Ewan MacColl' is an alias derived from the name of the nineteenth-century Gaelic poet Eoghan MacColla: his real name is James 'Jimmie' Miller, and it was changed when he deserted during military service in World War II and hid in Urmston, Greater Manchester, for several years.

MacColl made creative use of a workers' network of institutions in Salford, including the Workers' Arts Club and Salford Workers' Film Society, where he was able to view international experimental political films by the likes of Pudovkin and Eisenstein, which influenced his future work (Harker, 2007: 16). He was also introduced to radical theatre and began to attend Communist Party meetings. He remembers how, for him, this 'transformed' the 'landscape of Salford and Manchester', which had never been the same 'since he'd read Engels' *The Condition of*

the Working Class in England' (Harker, 2007: 20). Thus inspired, MacColl formed a Salford branch of the Workers' Theatre Movement in 1931 and took an interest in German and Soviet radical theatre (23). From this evolved 'The Red Megaphones', a political theatre group that performed at a series of events across Manchester and used a variety of performance styles.

In touch with theatre groups in the United States and the Soviet Union and with exiled German theatre workers, Red Megaphones toured their work to disseminate their left-wing message in working-class townships, villages of the north-west and in Manchester districts (Goorney and MacColl, 1986: xxiv). In 1938 MacColl and Littlewood created the Theatre Union with the task to bring plays 'of social significance' to 'the widest possible public', particularly to those who had been 'starved' of theatre (Harker, 2007: 55). The 'theme of unemployment' ran through their play, *Last Edition: A Living Newspaper Dealing with Events from 1934 to 1940*, which 'represented a complete break with formal theatre staging' and was described as a 'living newspaper' – part 'documentary' and part 'revue' (Goorney and MacColl, 1986: xivi).

Theatre Workshop evolved from this, operating initially from Kendal, but eventually relocating to Stratford East from where it exerted considerable influence upon English theatre and film in the late 1950s and early 1960s, as it developed stage plays such as *Oh! What a Lovely War*, *Fings Ain't Wot They Used to Be*, *Sparrers Can't Sing* and *A Taste of Honey*. Meanwhile, MacColl and Littlewood's influence in Manchester also spread to radio. Having taken to singing and to writing folk songs, MacColl would sing in the city streets, and in 1934 was spotted by a BBC radio scriptwriter, who invited him to work at BBC North Region as an actor.

A. E. Harding and the North

The BBC North Region also demonstrated a concern with social and class-related issues at the time, and continuities are evident with The Smiths' Manchester aesthetic discussed here. Scannell refers to the 'distinctive brand of regionalism' produced at the Manchester studio following the early 1930s establishment of the BBC's regional stations. This 'foregrounded ordinary working people both within the programmes and as part of the audience for whom they were made'. The 'double focus on the everyday lives and tastes of the majority' contrasted with the National Programme, broadcast from London in the 1930s (Scannell, 1986: 22). Towards the end of the 1920s the

BBC developed 'Features' programmes that combined drama and journalism, some of which incorporated Pudovkin's cinema methods of slow motion, dissolves, fades, montage and mixes – as in the work of Lance Sieveking, for example (Scannell and Cardiff, 1991: 135–136). During turbulent economic and political times, the BBC also adopted some of the methods of documentary-realist filmmakers such as John Grierson and Robert Flaherty for radio 'features' (Crisell, 1997: 36). The BBC Talks Department developed major series on social issues and 'the condition of England' from the early 1930s (Scannell, 1986: 7). These included the series *Other People's Houses*, *SOS* (both 1933), *Time to Spare* and the single programme *'Opping 'Oliday* (both 1934) – all of which represented social issues relating to working-class life in difficult times (Scannell and Cardiff, 1991: 58, 147).

A 'purge' of Talks in 1935 followed protests from the right-wing press about the National Programme's intervention in social issues (Scannell, 1986: 14). However, programmes that documented the lives of working-class people continued to be made by the BBC North Region in Manchester. E. ('Archie') Harding had become programme director in 1933 following his exile from the National Programme because of the nature of his left-wing work. In Manchester, Harding gathered local talent – among others, poet and writer Geoffrey Bridson – and some came from the local theatre circuit to work for the unit. In 1935, Bridson created *Harry Hopeful*, which observed the North through the lens of an imaginary character roaming the area in search of work. He produced four programmes in 1937 about the area's major industries – *Steel*, *Cotton*, *Wool*, and *Coal* – after the Manchester station acquired a mobile recording unit. Littlewood was presenter of *Coal*, she and Bridson spending a month amidst mining communities to research the scripted programme (Scannell and Cardiff, 1991: 343–344).

Olive Shapley was also innovative, recording people talking in their ordinary situations throughout the region with the mobile unit. Working with Littlewood, MacColl and Wilfred Pickles, she produced programmes on a range of human activities, including: *Pounds, Shillings and Pence: A Study in Shopping* (1938); *Homeless People* (1938); and *Canal Journey* (1939) (Scannell and Cardiff, 1991: 346). *They Speak For Themselves* (1939) was an hour long examination of mass observation that combined studio presentation and discussion with recorded actuality and music. Continuity is evident in a lineage of Manchester productions as Littlewood made Engels's *The Condition of the Working Class in England* 'the historical point of reference' for *The Classic Soil* (1939), produced by Shapley and written by Littlewood, and which

made representation of working-class life in Manchester a century earlier and, hence, made a comparison between the two periods. Meanwhile, MacColl also wrote for the BBC North Region; his *The Chartists' March* was broadcast on 13 May 1938, in commemoration of the centenary of that movement (Scannell and Cardiff, 1991: 353). Franklin importantly notes that the work of the BBC North Region 'more faithfully attempted to bring working-class culture and voice to the microphone. Here at the edge of the BBC's empire there was less distance between producers and listeners' (2009: 32).

MacColl later worked with celebrated radio and television documentarist Denis Mitchell, who can be seen as 'an inheritor and upholder of the rich tradition of North Region feature production in the 1930s' (Franklin, 2009: 95). In Mitchell's *Night in the City* (1955), continuity is particularly evident between MacColl's experiences in Salford, his theatre work in the region, and the features work of BBC North Region. Mitchell used *Dirty Old Town*, the signature tune from MacColl's 1951 play *Landscape with Chimneys*, performed by Theatre Workshop, as the theme song, and also integrated it into the text of the programme (Harker, 2007: 94). This radio documentary was an attempt to capture the atmosphere of Manchester at night and made use of the recorded voices of people in the hidden 'layers within society almost entirely ignored or forgotten in public life' (Franklin, 2009: 103). This was typical of 'Mitchell's urban ethnography for the BBC North Region' (94). Franklin notes the 'bleakness' of the programme, and this illustrates the consistency in the structure of feeling that spans decades of media production in Manchester (109). With their mobilisation of comparably bleak images and social commentary, The Smiths emphasise this continuity. It is notable that Ewan's daughter, singer Kirsty MacColl, became a close friend of The Smiths and 'irreplaceable' to Morrissey (quoted, Goddard, 2012: 234). She sang backing vocals on *Ask* and *Golden Lights* in 1986 and worked individually with both Smiths songwriters before her tragic death in 2000.

Manchester militancy

Campbell and Coulter note 'the radical politics and aesthetics' of The Smiths, arguing:

[T]he songs of Morrissey and Marr undermined the mores and practices at the very heart of the prevailing social order – the work ethic, the cult of the consumer, the imperatives of inherited privilege, the

instrumentalism of the culture industries and so on. The critique of bourgeois society tendered by the Smiths was always, therefore, likely to provoke the wrath of the political and cultural establishment'. (2010: 6)

This radicalism is a legacy of MacColl's and Littlewood's activities in Manchester, Salford and regions, and the texts they produced. Whether unconsciously or consciously, Morrissey retrieved and reactivated this legacy via an intermediate 1950s/1960s structure of feeling around Shelagh Delaney, Free Cinema, British New Wave and the social-realist soap, *Coronation Street*, of which he was a fan and had submitted script ideas to it as a boy (Goddard, 2012: 80).

The influence across generations is discernible in Morrissey's song, *Margaret on the Guillotine*, from his first solo LP *Viva Hate* (1988) and MacColl's song, *Dirty Old Town*, from his play, *Landscape with Chimneys*, a portrayal of northern industrial life and which predates by several years the English 'kitchen sink realism' of the late 1950s early 1960s. The lyrics of this now well-known folk song about the Salford of MacColl's youth include the lines, 'I'm going to make a good sharp axe', and 'We'll chop you down like an old dead tree' (*Dirty Old Town*, MacColl, 1949). The sentiment, which suggests a revolutionary response to appalling social conditions, is the same as in *Margaret on the Guillotine*, which was originally the title of The Smiths' LP *The Queen is Dead*, released in 1986 when Thatcher was at the height of her political power. The 'death sentence' pronounced in *Guillotine* showed that the implied author, Morrissey, similarly hankered 'after violent reprisal' (Brooker, 2010: 26–27). Like MacColl, he was interviewed by Special Branch Task Force to gauge whether or not he posed a security threat (Morrissey, 2013: 226; see also Smith, 2012; Harker). Meanwhile, an association can also be made between the heritage of MacColl's and Littlewood's radical left-wing, agit-prop theatre in Greater Manchester and The Smiths' song, *A Rush and a Push and The Land is Ours* (1987), which demonstrates a commitment to revolution with Irish nationalist connotations. The title is derived from a revolutionary call to arms written by Oscar Wilde's mother under the pseudonym of Speranza in 1848 (Goddard, 2012: 370).

Harker reports that the members of MacColl's and Littlewood's Theatre Union regarded it as a 'cause', and that '[s]hoplifting from the petit bourgeoisie was sanctioned'; anything 'to assist the theatre of the future' was considered 'fair game' (2007: 57). The Smiths' song *Shoplifters of the World Unite* (1987) exhibits very similar sentiments. That it features the

word 'Unite', from the end of Marx's Communist Manifesto confirms, as Goddard observes, that the song is a call to revolutionary activity (2010: 388). A personal recollection by Morrissey is illustrative of the structure of feeling associated with a downtrodden Manchester city centre. The singer recalls that when his aunt Rita became upwardly mobile and acquired a manager's job at Chelsea Girl in Piccadilly, she could 'often be spotted chasing shoplifters through [the adjacent] Piccadilly Gardens' (Morrissey, 2013: 144). Again, in this observation Morrissey recalls local detail with a bathetic twist. As with other Smiths' songs, *Shoplifters* makes a political comment through the apparent portrayal of working class ordinariness (petty pilferers), and the statement of an otherness that must remain hidden, as illustrated in the line, 'My only weakness is... well, never mind, never mind' (*Shoplifters of the World Unite*, The Smiths, 1987). This unwillingness to disclose otherness, to decline to open-up, represents a common inhibition and denial of voice among the class-bound lower orders.

It has been seen that The Smiths' work was politically motivated and was a reaction against the political oppression that was being exerted during their time, particularly against the working-class and those involved in industrial labour and the public-service sector. In a milieu in which the do-it-yourself ethos of punk rock had, among some practitioners, evolved into the founding of bands with enterprising, commercial agendas, binary opposition became evident in British rock/pop between New Pop and 'alternative' rock. A strong provincial punk scene in Manchester gave birth to a number of bands with diverse styles, linked largely by their geographical origins in Greater Manchester but also by a dystopian imagery. The Smiths evinced a wider cultural perspective, their music incorporating a range of diverse influences, their lyrics demonstrating literary qualities. Self-conscious regarding his own background, the lyricist Morrissey reconstituted images of Manchester and other aspects of British life, in the creation of songs that critiqued many aspects of contemporary eighties life. In doing so, The Smiths focused on certain aspects of Manchester life, particularly those associated with working-class culture and the Manchester of the late 1950s and the 1960s. I have used Williams's concept of 'structure of feeling' as a theoretical tool with which to summarise areas of activity and feeling that are lived and felt, but which are often submerged or which elude definition. I have pointed out here the continuities between the work of The Smiths and the radical working-class theatre produced by Ewan MacColl and Joan Littlewood. It has been seen that this Manchester and Salford heritage of political activism and left-wing representation was

also a feature of productions the BBC North Region in the 1930s. Finally, a continuity of some themes in this body of work is demonstrated to have been incorporated into The Smiths' lyrics. The rain may regularly fall in the region of Greater Manchester – indeed this was instrumental in its industrial ascent (Taylor et al., 1996: 46) – but its heritage of radical creative production, upheld in the work of The Smiths, strongly argues against the town being 'humdrum'.

AQ2 References

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