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Rattling out of control: A comparison of U2 and Joy Division on film

ABSTRACT

This article integrates Popular Music Studies, Film Studies and Fashion Studies to offer a comparative analysis of Joy Division and U2 in the cinema. It focuses primarily on the films Control (Corbijn, 2007) and Rattle and Hum (Joanou, 1988), and looks at how popular musical performance and sub-cultural style are intertwined with the representation of city space and the construction of metropolitan identities. It does this via consideration of filmic style but in a manner sensitive to the broader sociopolitical and popular musical discourses that frame these representations. The article argues that popular music's relationship to the cinema, and to representations of place, has been much neglected in Film Studies. As such, it considers the rock/performance/fashion/place nexus in some detail.

KEYWORDS

Dublin
fashion
identity
Irishness
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Manchester
popular music
post-punk
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U2

INTRODUCTION

As anthropologist James Clifford has argued, a feature of late capitalism is that culture can no longer be said to be 'in' a place (Clifford 1992: 98–100). If this is so and 'placelessness' is now an accepted feature of postmodern geographies, it is somewhat surprising that places, especially cities (and their specific location markers), are a prominent feature of contemporary cinematic representation. Against the tide of city-centres increasingly coming to resemble one

1. Powrie defines 'alternative heritage' as a counter-past/tradition to the dominant 'bourgeois heritage film' as described and analysed by Higson (1993) and Hill (1999: 74–123). Powrie's 'alternative' is exemplified by the work of film-makers such as Terence Davies, particularly 1988's *Distant Voices, Still Lives*, which focuses upon northern, working-class experience (and in a self-reflexive sense) over and above the privileged classes.
2. Brown appeared on the cover in January 1990 (*The Face* 2: 16). This was accompanied by a feature interview with both The Stones Roses and The Happy Mondays by Nick Kent entitled 'The Mancunian Candidates' (Kent 1990). Gallagher bedecked the front of *The Face* 2: 71 in 1994.

another, it seems that city-based mythologies are on the rise, promoting the distinctiveness of particular urban locales – their peculiar accents, fashions and 'attitudes' – in the face of apparent global cultural homogenization (an aspect of power producing multiple resistances). One perhaps superficial symptom of this is the European City of Culture bidding-wars, whereby cities are increasingly brought into competition with one another. This inter-city competition often underpins the clamour for regeneration money and the concomitant rush for investment capital deemed necessary for city development in the face of de-industrialization and the so-called 'turn to culture' (Samuel 1994; Wright 2009). Interestingly, rock and popular music – or more accurately its legacy in the form of popular musical nostalgia – has begun to play an increasingly conspicuous role in the types of heritage enterprise that have become a central plank in the culture industries (Cohen, Schofield and Lashua 2009). In a sense, the widespread 'retromania' apparent in popular music culture has been fuelled by the flattening out of popular music history via peer-to-peer file sharing systems such as Soulseek and sites such as YouTube and Spotify, which have actively assisted in keeping the popular music of the past alive as a vital part of the present juncture. These changes in the political economy of popular music culture, and the new patterns of distribution and consumption they have shaped, have played a powerful role in the (re)construction of broader city-based mythologies in the cinema – what Phil Powrie has labelled 'alternative heritage' (2000: 317–20).¹ If these popular musical representations of place and identity (and the sub-cultural styles that are their most outward manifestation) are vital in marking out cities as distinctive and thus in attracting investment, especially in the arena of tourism and tourist-related revenues, it is somewhat surprising that they are relatively under-analysed in Film Studies.

A TALE OF TWO CITIES

This article seeks to explore two such city-based popular musical and rock/fashion mythologies in the cinema. To narrow the focus it will consider how city space is entwined with regional/national discourses and identities in the representation of two bands prominently associated with their respective cities of origin: Joy Division's Manchester and U2's Dublin. As the largest urban area in northern England, Manchester is undoubtedly (after London) the most mythologized popular musical city in the United Kingdom, with an impressive roster of globally visible rock bands spanning the last three decades. In addition to the subject of this article and its successor band, New Order, the city has also produced The Smiths and Oasis, as well as The Fall, Magazine, The Buzzcocks and many others. Manchester also briefly became 'Madchester' when it surfed on a wave of innovative rock/dance cross-over bands such as The Happy Mondays and The Stones Roses in the fall-out of the much-mythologized 'second summer of love' of 1988/89. Indeed Manchester played a pivotal role in the broader story of 'rave', with the city's legendary Hacienda club at dance culture's epicentre (Hook 2009; Reynolds 1998: 70–1). The city also occupied the fashion spotlight in the early-to-mid-1990s with Ian Brown of The Stones Roses and Liam Gallagher of Oasis appearing on separate covers of the now defunct style bible *The Face*, cementing its base as an export centre of a distinctive – and decidedly proletarian – male 'look' to the rest of the United Kingdom (The Stone Roses with 'indie baggy' and Oasis with a version of the mod revival).² As Simon Reynolds has rather caustically put it: 'no British city has a greater sense of self mystique than Manchester' (Reynolds

2009b: 358), revealing that its distinctive music and fashions stand close to the top of an informal hierarchy of international popular musical cities.³

In this impressive history Joy Division are unusual in that two feature length films – Michael Winterbottom’s *24 Hour Party People* (2002) and Anton Corbijn’s *Control* (2007) – and one feature length documentary – Grant Gee’s *Joy Division* (2007) – have explored their legacy (albeit to different degrees). The first of these, *24 Hour Party People*, does not focus exclusively on the band (even if they are pivotal to the overall story) but on the late Anthony H. Wilson, and his initial career as a regional television presenter/broadcaster and as then co-founder and CEO of cult record label, Factory. *Control*, based on lead singer Ian Curtis’ widow Deborah’s memoir, *Touching from a Distance* (1995), is more completely devoted to the story of singer and band, and in so doing on reproducing the ‘texture’ of Manchester in the mid-1970s to the turn of the decade. Gee’s documentary takes a more analytical and ‘academic’ approach, incorporating interviews with key protagonists and their associates alongside archive footage of both band and city. The three films make for a particularly impressive triptych, approaching post-punk Manchester from different perspectives, and in so doing helped to promote the city’s significant contribution to the current post-punk revival (encapsulated in the ‘underground’ scenes of London’s trendy – and much maligned – Shoreditch area and in the many contemporary bands citing post-punk bands as influences, such as Interpol and The Editors).⁴ However, the revival is more seriously announced, in a critical/academic sense, by the publication of Simon Reynolds’ seminal account of the movement, *Rip It Up and Start Again* (2005).⁵

The Irish capital, by contrast, while widely known in international representations as a musical city, is, perhaps ironically, much less mythologized than its northern English counterpart. This is certainly the case in popular musical and related ‘style’ media in the United Kingdom. While Dublin has provided the setting for Alan Parker’s hit film *The Commitments* (1991), as well as more recently in the low-budget Oscar-winning film *Once* (Carney, 2006), Dublin has not been associated with the same depth or breadth of popular musical legacy; nor has it been regarded as a centre for fashion (especially in its pre-‘Celtic Tiger’ days). In a primary sense, while the Irish capital is known as a musical city it is in a manner more closely allied with a more general national discourse and the Irish’s long-established reputation for an innate musicality (and the legacy of folk and traditional music) and less with a specific popular musical movement, subgenre or sub-cultural style (see McLaughlin and McLoone 2000; Smyth 2005; Campbell 2010).⁶ In short, Dublin, despite its international popular musical profile, does not possess the ‘sub-cultural capital’ (Thornton 1995: 121) and elaborated scene mythology of its more conspicuously ‘fashionable’ northern English neighbour. Music and its attendant clothing styles have been much more explicitly coupled to ethnicity in a way perhaps unthinkable in the UK context.⁷ Once again this is somewhat ironic, as Dublin is, of course, the base for U2, widely touted in popular discourse as the biggest band in the world. Despite the group’s ubiquitous presence in global media, the city from which they have emerged and continue to reside and record in has little in the way of a popular music mythology, with the majority of internationally successful Irish acts prior to U2’s emergence, such as Thin Lizzy and The Boomtown Rats, having had to leave Dublin in order to ‘make it’ (McLaughlin 2009; 2011). Dublin, therefore, is something of an ‘unknown’ city in popular musical and rock fashion terms (and especially so in the late 1970s and 1980s, the period that is the focus of

3. In a special issue of *Popular Music History* devoted to popular music making, city space and urban regeneration, Keeffe (2009) argues somewhat controversially – and against the orthodoxy – that disastrous city-planning can have a beneficial effect on popular music production. His case-study of the mass housing estates in Hulme, and the role they played in generating the vibrant post-punk scene in Manchester in the late 1970s, neatly ties in with the focus of this article.
4. For an example of anti-Shoreditch invective, see the website www.ihatehipsters.com
5. This post-punk revivalism was continued in a series of BBC documentaries, most notably *Synth Britannia* (last broadcast on BBC4 on the 2 August 2010), that explored the key protagonists of the movement in some depth, and *Krautrock: The Rebirth of Germany* (BBC4 15 October 2010) which, in part, explored post-punk’s roots.
6. For example, David Muggleton (2000) in one of the most complete studies of sub-cultural style post-Hebdige doesn’t even mention Ireland, Dublin or Irishness – a sign that sub-culture is frequently regarded as a default English phenomenon.
7. An obvious index of this can be glimpsed in a trawl through the British music press and the seemingly endless re-cycling of special features on Manchester against the relative paucity of profiles of Dublin.

8. A sign that Joy Division's 'cult' place has been a largely UK, European and 'underground' phenomenon in the United States can be glimpsed in the American publication *Faking It: The Quest for Authenticity in Popular Music*, where neither singer Ian Curtis nor the band are even mentioned (Barker and Taylor 2007).
9. The name conjures up images of eastern Europe – concrete tower blocks and grey monochrome – prior to the fall of the iron curtain. Of course, Joy Division is taken from the name for the prostitution wing of the concentration camps and forms a part of the band's wider fascination with fascist imagery. U2, by contrast, is hyper-inclusive.
10. This video with its dark, funereal and medieval iconography offered graphically stark images of hooded monks in procession, carrying blown-up images of Curtis along a barren beach. The implication is clear: the singer is being canonized as a saint and martyr.

this article). As U2 possessed little in the way of an *a priori* popular musical city-based mythology to draw upon, they had, to an extent, to set about constructing their own (which, as will become apparent, led to some difficulties and dilemmas in the process). In fact, to a degree, U2 had to uncouple their identity from many of the dominant markers of Irish ethnicity, whether in the form of folk and traditional sounds and/or the broader stereotypes of the Irish circulating in Anglo-American media (see Hill 1988; McLoone 2000). *Rattle and Hum* (Joanou, 1988) is therefore an interesting case study, as it is the band's first cinema film and one that had major Hollywood distribution by Paramount Pictures. More significantly for the discussion here, it explicitly mobilizes discourses of place and nation, and does so in interesting and complex ways (and is therefore a useful companion piece to *Control*).

If U2 occupy a prominent place in terms of global record sales, conversely 'the mystique surrounding Joy Division has always been way out of proportion to their record sales' (Reynolds 2009b: 361). In fact, Joy Division's sub-cultural standing has never translated into straightforward commercial success, and the band, in Simon Frith's view, are one of the significant 'market failures' in rock (Frith 1996: 15).⁸

At first glance there appears to be no obvious reason to link and compare these two bands apart from them hailing from respective 'regional' cities, and thus the impulse to compare might seem arbitrary. However, there are important connections that merit such a comparative approach. The two groups evolved at roughly the same point in history. U2 formed initially as Feedback in 1976 at Dublin's Mount Temple Comprehensive School in the city's Northside, briefly becoming The Hype, before settling on their long-standing and economical moniker. Joy Division started their much briefer lifespan as Warsaw⁹ – also in 1976 – after seeing The Sex Pistols' infamous gig at Manchester's Lesser Free Trade Hall in the same year; and U2, of course, were also inspired by punk (even if they were never proper punks) and the visit of The Clash to Dublin's Trinity College, with a suitably impressed young Paul Hewson in attendance.

In addition to emerging from the immediate aftermath of punk (and the local/regional energies it released), both groups share the auteur photographer, music video, and more recently film director, Anton Corbijn. The Dutch artist has produced much of both bands' iconic imagery and thus contributed to their respective mythologies. As a young photographer he took the infamous 1979 black-and-white photograph of Joy Division in their signature long, dark overcoats at the top of the steps of Lancaster Gate tube station on London Underground's Central Line. Three members of the group are pitch black silhouettes with their backs turned to the camera; only lead singer Ian Curtis reveals his face in profile. Indeed this 'noir' image became a trademark one of the band, establishing literally and metaphorically their urban, 'underground' credentials with the high-contrast 'grainy' monochrome that was soon to become Corbijn's signature, corresponding to and amplifying the band's stark and steely existential music. He also directed the posthumous video promo for 'Atmosphere' (1988), which lionized the singer, as well as the feature-length Curtis biopic.¹⁰ His work for U2, however, is more extensive. Despite not having directed a feature length film of the band (after all, rock artists tend to become the subject of biopics after their death), he has designed the album covers for *War* (1983), *The Unforgettable Fire* (1984), *The Joshua Tree* (1987), *Rattle and Hum* (1988), *Achtung Baby!* (1991), *How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb* (2004) and directed videos for the singles 'One' (1992), 'Please' (1997) and

'Electrical Storm' (2002).¹¹ Interestingly, even though *Rattle and Hum* was directed by Spielberg protégé, Phil Joanou, it is in many respects a Corbijn film, maintaining the look of his studied high-contrast black-and-white imagery of the band.

Furthermore, both bands shared the late Martin Hannett, the renowned maverick producer who brought his distinctive style to Joy Division's two studio albums, *Unknown Pleasures* (1979) and *Closer* (1980), and to U2's first international single release, '11 O'Clock Tick Tock' (1980). While Joy Division were recording 'Love Will Tear Us Apart' with Hannett in a London studio, the young Irish band were hovering in the background watching them at work (Reynolds 2009b: 70–1, McCormick 2006: 121–3). Bono certainly appeared to be in awe of Curtis' 'big, haunted and hunted voice'. Crucially, for the U2 singer, Joy Division represented 'a very religious point in music' – that 'amongst the squalor of everyday life, they were building with their music some kind of cathedral' (McCormick 2006: 122). The young U2 were also impressed by the breadth of Joy Division's musical tastes as evidenced by the band's 'incredible' record collection, which ran from Wagner to Frank Sinatra (McCormick 2006: 122). Indeed this brief coming together in time and space for the two bands (with U2 admitting to playing 'catch-up' to their more developed counterparts) has led to some resentment in recent years with both Tony Wilson and Peter Hook being especially vocal about U2 'ripping off' the Manchester band's sound and taking it onto the global stage (Hook 2007).¹² Wilson even recounts a story of how, after Curtis' death, Bono in expressing his grief announced how he was going 'to do it for Ian' (Reynolds 2005: 451).¹³ The question, of course, is 'do what'?

Indeed what is noteworthy is that, in part, the mystique surrounding Joy Division was compounded by the *lack* of available imagery. In contrast to the contemporary context where images of bands are widely available, it was relatively difficult at the time to ascertain what Ian Curtis looked like, with the singer something of an 'absent presence'. As Reynolds notes, of the few images available, most were shot by the young Dutchman (Reynolds 2009b: 361) and by photographer Kevin Cummins. This was largely because Factory Records actively avoided picture sleeves and eschewed portraiture-style publicity shots as a 'strategy of differentiation' to announce the label and band's 'seriousness'. Of course, this was to suit their existential and sombre music – what Simon Reynolds (2009a) has termed Joy Division's 'religion of the void'. It also means that as the director of *Control* nearly three decades later, Corbijn was in the unusual position of re-mythologizing a band he had greatly contributed to mythologizing previously. Significantly, clothing was to become a powerful outward index of the band's music. As Cummins has noted, the band were most often described via their sartorial style, and were widely known for spearheading the sub-genre of 'grey overcoat music', a label bequeathed to the Manchester band by the London music press (Cummins 2009).

By contrast, whereas images of Ian Curtis and Joy Division were relatively difficult to find, Bono and U2 were not exactly publicity shy. These contrasts can be opened out further. Curtis, not unlike many other British post-punk icons of the period, was sceptical about stateside success, whereas Bono early in his career was naked in his ambition to travel to America and 'give it what it wants, what it needs' (Henke 1994: 2).

However, the two groups shared an explicitly anti-brand ideology, with their respective choices of attire owing more to the army-surplus store and the vintage clothing retailer than to the label conscious culture of the 1990s

11. A 2010 profile of Corbijn in the UK's *Observer* newspaper (7 November) notes the artist's 30-year relationship with U2, and indeed out of the several iconic photographs selected by him for inclusion, one is of the young Irish band the other is of Ian Curtis
12. The idea of U2 as a Joy Division clone is problematic. U2 rarely deployed the bass guitar in its high register as lead instrument, nor did Joy Division's work evidence the chiming, celestial guitar work that became the Edge's signature. Curtis' existential dread was the opposite of Bono's affirmative, upward drives. One was a poet of the difficulties of existence; the other, something of a crusader for positive thought.
13. Wilson recounts: '[...] I remember Bono sitting on my desk and telling me how incredibly sorry he was about Ian's death, how it had really hurt him [...] how Ian was the number one singer of his generation, and he, Bono, knew he was always only ever going to be number two [...] And he said something else, something like, "Now he's gone, I promise you I'll do it for him." Not that silly, but along those lines' (Reynolds 2005: 451).

14. Arguably, the first two discourses U2 would have found it difficult, even impossible, to tap in to.
15. Many of the interviewees in Gee's documentary talk poetically about Joy Division as the authentic sound of Manchester and about how the band's music 'ambiently' reflects the city space, variously constructing a 'science fiction' or working-class Manchester. Of course, these are readings and not 'in' (i.e. essential properties of) the music, but an aspect of the music being 'colonized' by place-bound discourse. Nonetheless, the multi-discursiveness of Gee's film opens up and elaborates the band's music, whereas *Control* tends to close it down.

onwards. Clothing was not, therefore, identifiable by make or manufacturer, which left both bands' identities at a greater distance from what might be termed the *discourse of the brand*. Despite sharing this anti-fashion, or non-brand, ideology in common, each bands' clothing styles also corresponded closely to other signifying elements, with graphics, clothes, music and performance elegantly supporting and animating one another (although what each band signified was patently very different).

Therefore, these are two key post-punk bands that emerged from a period of political, historical and musical upheaval, both of which circumvented London and that had to find imagery to announce their difference, their distinctiveness against the centrifugal pull of the UK capital. Of course, we know the outcome of the story. U2 went on to secure world domination as a global super-b(r)and; whereas Curtis committed suicide before Joy Division's first scheduled tour of the United States. The group, though, were to have a hugely successful posthumous career, enduring as perhaps the most cultish of cult bands and Curtis the most elusive and enigmatic of figures. In a sense, both bands in their different ways are prominent fixtures of the contemporary popular musical and related audio-visual landscape. But, the interesting question remains: how has the cinema represented their respective oeuvres and how do spaces (both musical and actual), and aspects of place and nation figure in these representations? And how, and in what way, do the semiotics of costume, music and performance feature in this confluence of factors?

OUT OF CONTROL: CORBIJN'S CURTIS

The three films involving Joy Division take Manchester as their centre, and Gee's documentary in particular is concerned to locate the band in historically and spatially specific terms: post-war reconstruction, the (post)modern and (post)industrial alienation of a decaying city, as well as the ascendant musico-political styles/attitudes of the period.¹⁴ In a sense, the subtext of both Gee's and Corbijn's films is a message about the correspondence of music and place; or more precisely about dark yet beautiful music emerging from what Joy Division guitarist Bernard Sumner described as 'such an ugly place' (Gee 2007). In fact, many of the commentators interviewed in *Joy Division* offer explicit, and essentialist (i.e. necessary) city space/musical style connections.¹⁵

Of course, it is easy to be critical of this sense of a hermetically sealed, or anthropologically bounded, Manchester, as Joy Division (like U2) clearly sit in the nexus of a whole series of transnational sonic, thematic and performative tramlines (Ballard, Bergman, Bowie, Burroughs, Camus, Can, Herzog, The Velvet Underground, Wagner and so forth).

Unlike Gee's documentary, *Control* tends to ground Joy Division's music in Ian Curtis' biography. This is a problem for the rock biopic more generally: anchoring the music in the private details of the singer's life. Thus, as Reynolds argues, the sombre and existential music becomes 'explained' as an expression of Curtis' tortured state; his unhappy marriage, guilt at his infidelity, the problems presented by his worsening epilepsy and so forth (Reynolds 2009b: 362). Therefore, while Joy Division and *Control* circulate more obviously within the symbolic economy of 'cool' and its related sub-cultural kudos than U2, and especially *Rattle and Hum* have ever done, the latter film has the advantage of focusing attention on music and its performance in a manner that does not so narrowly close down interpretation.



Figure 1: Sam Riley as Ian Curtis in 'signature' grey overcoat.

Control is an unusual film. Part of the pleasure it offers is the provision of images of 'Ian Curtis' (Sam Riley) and the band in the face of their relative paucity. Beyond this, it is an odd and uneasy hybrid of working-class (or northern) realism, the rock biopic, the documentary drama and the European art film as defined by David Bordwell (1985); what Reynolds describes as its 'Bergman-esque' qualities (Reynolds 2009b: 361). *Control* may be described as 'alternative heritage' in two senses: first, in its concern with working-class experience; and, secondly, in its focus on rock/popular music culture. In relation to the first point, the film references the 'Angry Young Men' or British New Wave films of the late 1950s and early 1960s (Hill 1986). Thus, the film deploys the *mise-en-scène* of red brick, back-to-back terrace housing, post-war tower-blocks and barren concrete walkways.

It also utilizes the theme of escape from the constraints of class and location, which, like the New Wave films, is largely figured in terms of domestic entrapment. Curtis, then, functions as something of a latter-day, popular musical Jimmy Porter. As with *Room at the Top* (Clayton, 1959) and many of the New Wave films, *Control's* Curtis is escaping less from class than from the conventionally feminine. In this sense, both Deborah Curtis (Samantha Morton) and infant daughter Natalie (Eady Williams), function as obstacles to masculine 'freedoms' embodied in the homo-social bonding of the band as the 'imagined community' of men without women. The intellectual and exotically sexual excitement of Belgian music writer Annik Honoré (Alexandra Maria Lara) acts as a counterweight to the stifling domesticity of wife Deborah, and the film centres on the trope of creative labour as a means of escape; of transcending (existentially and literally) the dissatisfactions of one's habitus.¹⁶ It is significant, and indeed crudely symbolic, that Curtis hangs himself in the kitchen from a clothes drier littered with baby clothes mounted on the ceiling (the drier had been eyed, mournfully, by the depressed singer in an earlier close-up, subjective point-of-view shot).

However, *Control* may be regarded as 'alternative heritage' for a third and less directly cinematic reason. By focusing on urban (and northern) post-punk it is breaking with a dominant English *rock* heritage – particularly the 'golden age' of the mid-1960s – or what might, more openly, be termed The Beatles/Stones to punk axis, which has been the subject of a broader cultural nostalgia. In this sense, the film joins Reynolds' seminal historical analysis of the movement in opening up the musical and political importance of the punk aftermath against a rock cultural impulse that has equated the movement

16. Indeed the film echoes *Room at the Top* with Curtis' attraction to Honoré invoking Joe Lampton's attraction to Alice Aisgill (the 'exotic' Simone Signoret). It also offers a similar thesis on male 'creativity' and its relationship to domesticity as the participant interviewees in Sara Cohen's *Rock Culture in Liverpool*, where wives and girlfriends are frequently offered as obstacles to group success.

17. Post-punk was, of course, a broad church encompassing a range of musical styles and performance modes; from the reconstructed 'rock' of Joy Division and PIL, to the experimental sonics of Cabaret Voltaire, and the innovative synth-pop of The Human League and Soft Cell. As Martin Ware of Heaven 17 put it in a *Guardian* cover story on synth-pop: '[...] bands like Spandau Ballet and Duran Duran [...] They just wanted to be famous and buried the more credible end of it' (Lynskey 2010).
18. The film does play games with chronology. The band's first television appearance on *Granada Reports* in 1978 was 'Shadowplay', which is replaced in *Control* by the later performance of 'Transmission'. Despite how good the actors' recreation of the latter track is, it does not have the power of the 'Shadowplay' performance as it anchors the performance in the responses of family members watching at home in anticipation, again grounding the music in narrative explanations.
19. This is a point made forcefully in Gee's documentary which legitimates Marshall Berman's appropriation of Karl Marx – that late modernity is marked by ephemerality and transience (*All That is Solid Melts into Air* 1983).

with 'twee' synth-pop, and caricatured the early 1980s as a period of bad hair, bad music, dressing-up and making money (a crude musical reflection of Thatcher's Britain).¹⁷

In Corbijn's film, music and its performance oscillate between being an expression of the world of grinding working-class existence and domestic joylessness *and* the positive counterweight to it. However, the director's decision to go with the actor ensemble's desire to recreate Joy Division's transcendent and powerful music is an interesting one. While the recreation of the music is driven by the documentary drama imperative, and is thus in keeping with the film's broader desire to reconstruct the surface details of the Manchester of the period, the fact that the musical performances – including the mimicry of Curtis' infamous and highly idiosyncratic 'epileptic dance' – are driven by the same logic introduces complexities. The first issue here relates to the concern for musical authenticity, both romantic and realist. If the music of the band is as unique, and as original, as has been claimed, then it is a significant tension that the actors are not just capable of passing themselves off as the band, but can actually articulate much of the power of the original performances. In fact, one post-punk contemporary, the keyboard player of Some Bizarre's Naked Lunch was so moved by the cinematic reconstruction of the incendiary Moonlight Club performances he had attended (where Curtis had a fit while performing 'Dead Souls') that he burst into tears (Clarke 2007). Indeed, and again ironically, arguably the most static and unconvincing musical performance is the similarly pain-staking recreation of the 'Love Will Tear Us Apart' video, which is the only performance where the actors mime to the original track. This tension between 'originality' and 'mimicry', between romantic authorship and its 'tribute band-type' reconstruction is an interesting one and a risky production strategy. In one vital sense it is surprising that *Control* was so well received critically as generally fans are resistant to imitations of originals (with 'authenticity' presumably less of a pressure in the absence of the real thing).¹⁸

As John Orr has pointed out, what is also unusual in a film so concerned with replicating late 1970s Manchester is how little is left of the city's iconic popular musical landmarks of the period (Orr 2008: 16). While it deploys the exterior of the small and symbolically claustrophobic terraced house in Macclesfield where Ian and Deborah Curtis lived, few of the Factory Records' buildings and gigging locations (such as the Factory Club) exist in regenerated Manchester, and the film makes ample use of studio sets. Hence, Orr argues, the film's imagery is largely 'local' rather than 'metropolitan' (Orr 2008: 16) and therefore it cannot directly highlight 'pilgrimage' sites in the manner of U2's Dublin (where tourists can visit the graffiti-smattered Windmill Lane studios [see Figure 2 below], or set up camp outside Bono's house in Killiney or have a drink in the Clarence Hotel).¹⁹

What we are presented with in *Control* then is a set of ironies: a film mythologizing Joy Division's legacy made by a key myth-maker; a film celebrating the power of original music-making that employs a strategy that presents a partial challenge to the notion of performative originality; one that seeks to celebrate a post-punk Manchester devoid of many of its specific and iconic locations. It is also a film, as Reynolds points out (playing the critical role of a popular musical John Hill), that curiously avoids sociocultural and historical specificities (even though he notes that Joy Division's music was never "'topical" in any crude sociopolitical sense' [Reynolds 2009b: 362]). Thus, *Control* is concerned with a realism that is driven by fidelity to (mediated)



Figure 2: A sample of the graffiti left by U2 fans from around the world on the walls of Windmill Lane recording studios in Dublin's docklands.

period detail, the recreation of televised 'live' performances, and the 'look' of Corbijn's and Cummins' original iconic photographs. These displace the political, historical, musical and place-based specifics of the period. In fact, in interviews about the film, Corbijn sounds remarkably similar to Ken Loach in his concern with verisimilitude, of *looking like 'the real'*. Furthermore, the band's music simply 'arrives', and there is no space in between forming as a group and forging that extraordinary sound (Reynolds 2009b: 365). There is, therefore, little exploration of how they developed; their journey from the punkish, yet derivative, Warsaw to *Unknown Pleasures*. And somewhat perversely, grounding the music in Manchester and in the conventions of working-class realism, actively works against elaborating the music. Likewise, the band abruptly move from wearing their 'everyday clothes' to adopting the 'anonymous' shared grey of the Joy Division 'uniform' – the pared-down iconography of buttoned long-sleeve shirts (often with the sleeves rolled-up), suit trousers, oxford shoes and short, side parted, and wedge haircuts. In fact, in Corbijn's and Cummins' iconic photographs the four members of the band are often sporting shirts of carefully co-ordinated and slightly different shades of grey. Thus, the clothes, as with the music, also simply 'arrive' and there is no exploration of how they decided on the look, nor consideration of what it signifies. In one vital sense, the band's stark clothing style, with its graphic simplicity, cut sharply against the garish qualities of punk and the vivaciousness associated with that recurring figure

20. The 'Transmission'-for-'Shadowplay' performance does not deploy the vision-mixing and long dissolves of the original. However 'primitive' these techniques may look, they offer a hypnotically flailing and 'shadowy' Curtis at the centre of the 'half-light' of the image amidst regularly sequenced moving traffic (in the style of a photographic negative). He is also framed between Hook's and Sumner's flailing guitars. As such, it is a moving invocation of the music and the existential and vulnerable shaman buffeted by the forces of modernity.

in English pop and rock – the dandy. They also, significantly, work against the semiotics of denim and the denim jeans and leather jackets favoured by so many rock groups. The minimalism and 'seriousness' of Joy Division's dress not only functioned as a visual index of the equally serious and minimal music, but also represented the proletarian 'everyman'. Thus, the 'quietness' of the clothing style subtly invoked the European, urban working-class of the inter-war years and/or the wartime refugee (whereas denim, by contrast, is difficult to divorce from its American working-class origins). It also had, as many commentators have observed, fascist connotations, echoing the band's name. The style, however, also owes something to Soviet militarism, particularly the adoption of the Soviet army's great coat. Whichever side of the 'ideological fence' the imagery falls, the band's style clearly dredges up images of European mass movements and of wartime northern and central/eastern Europe in particular. This 'collectivist' imagery also supports and gives outward expression to Curtis' individualized and existential lyrics, and ties in with the band's krautrock influences. In this sense, individualist and collectivist discourses intertwine. Moreover, when clothes, music and city space are considered together, Manchester becomes something of an extension of immediate post-war (eastern) Europe with its rows of grey, Brutalist tower blocks, pulling band and city out of the ambit of the regional and national (and unlike the film, the original imagery of the band largely eschewed the back-to-back terrace). Like the indie styles that Manchester was to export to the rest of the United Kingdom in the 1990s, the grey army greatcoat, the grey trench coat and the other aspects of the ensemble were taken up by Joy Division devotees across the United Kingdom. Indeed, in the current context many former sub-cultural fans will, one could aver, be wearing the clothes on the 'inside' (Muggleton 2000; Hills 2002); a reminder that, as Andy Medhurst has argued, not all fans wear their symbolic affiliations conspicuously as part of the 'tribe' (Medhurst 1999: 220–1). However, whereas in the 1990s Manchester became synonymous with the 'lad' and linked to cultures of consumption and the label/identity nexus, Joy Division's style invoked a rich tapestry of ideas; not least the appeal to the inner self and the fact that life may be devoid of meaning.

Control, though, does make some concession to laddism. Aside from Curtis, the film is not much interested in post-punk intellectualism and (and is seemingly suspicious of) the rich connections between ideas and music that underpinned the movement (Reynolds 2005). In fact, the other three band members, especially Peter Hook (Joe Anderson), are offered as rather oafish. Even the articulate and impassioned Tony Wilson (Craig Parkinson) is reduced – in a manner redolent of Mike Leigh – to an overly theatrical, foppish, middle-class buffoon. Significantly, Wilson may even function as the film's only peacock, festooned – and out of step – in his mid-1970s' longish hair, velvet jacket and flares. Thus, once again in British cinema, authenticity is the preserve of the working-classes, with the middle-class caricatured as affected, pretentious and two-dimensional. However (and here it is similar to *Rattle and Hum*), *Control* bursts into life when the music starts playing; even if it is music that exceeds, and is oddly disconnected from the locations and narrative conventions deployed.²⁰ In this way, the film succeeds in offering contemporary audiences something of the magnetism of this complicated and idiosyncratic front man and the music's affective power (and it is to its credit that it avoids offering up Curtis as a boorish lout in the manner of *24 Hour Party People*).

OUTSIDE IT'S AMERICA: OR, DO LOOK BACK – RATTLE AND HUM

Rattle and Hum begins with a live performance of The Beatles' 'Helter Skelter' and then moves to a long aerial shot travelling towards the Irish coastline from the sea, followed by a montage sequence of images of Dublin: the River Liffey, the city's docklands and surrounding streets. This is accompanied on the soundtrack by the sparse guitar ballad 'Van Diemen's Land' sung by The Edge, a song inspired by Fenian poet and later *Boston Pilot* newspaper editor, John Boyle O'Reilly. A significant figure in Irish history, O'Reilly was one of the leaders of the 1848 Rising against the British that followed the Great Famine and, as a journalist in later life, a vocal campaigner for racial equality. The song's narrative, as Bill Graham and Caroline van Oosten de Boer have pointed out, follows 'an Irish felon' and his deportation to the penal colony, Van Diemen's Land (modern Tasmania) in the Famine's wake, a fate that befell O'Reilly (Graham and van Oosten de Boer 2004: 38–9). Together the imagery and the music evoke the complex routes of the Irish diaspora and the city's place as a launch pad for waves of (enforced) Irish emigration – The Beatles and Irish-England, O'Reilly and Irish-Australia and Irish- America. (U2 are also drawing upon O'Reilly's anti-racist politics.) Significantly, the aerial shot towards the island and back into Dublin suggests the global rock band returning home as an Irish success story, as well as its rootedness in the city itself. Thus, *Rattle and Hum* at the outset intertwines two narratives: a broadly diasporic one (with its residue of displacement, exile and suffering) and the band's 'homecoming', linking the fates of band and nation.

This opening shot and its foregrounding of the nation's island status has become something of an Irish cinematic cliché (see Queenan 2000: 38).²¹ Indeed what marks out *Rattle and Hum* is just how little footage there is of the actual city: Dublin merely functions as a point of return and a point of departure. In fact the Dublin of the film's beginning initiates a flashback structure, with the band reflecting in the diegetic present on the tour which occupies the narrative. The film moves on from its Dublin location quite quickly with most of its duration devoted to *The Joshua Tree* tour in the United States.

This side-stepping of Ireland for the United States is no accident. 1983's *Under a Blood Red Sky* (Taylor, 1983), the band's first long form video release – and the text that most emphatically marked their international arrival – also avoided Dublin and located the band in the dramatic landscape of the Red Rocks arena, high in the Colorado Mountains near Denver. If *Under a Blood Red Sky* forges a particular Irish-American aesthetic via a distinctive hybrid of aspects of the ethereal/Celtic and post-punk, the Hollywood film goes in search of rock 'n' roll's roots. Despite furthering the concern with musical authenticity, *Rattle and Hum* may be regarded as postmodern (but not in the overt sense of the band's more conspicuously postmodern *Zoo TV* [Godley, 1992] era).²² In fact, *Rattle and Hum*, unlike *Under a Blood Red Sky*, is heavily driven by reference and allusion to rock's past: the blues; B.B. King; Elvis and Sun Studios; The Beatles and John Lennon; The Rolling Stones; Bob Dylan; Hendrix; and Billie Holiday. What is odd about the film – and its loose road movie narrative structure – is that U2, the most commercially successful band in the entire post-punk pantheon, appear to be guilty of 'rear-view mirrorism' – of driving forwards into the past – and turning away from post-punk's perpetual forward momentum (its deconstructionist and reconstructionist logics) by 'looking back' to rock's golden age. Conversely, the three Joy Division films offer an alternative version of the English rock canon and a

21. Gee's film includes a section cut to 'Disorder' from *Unknown Pleasures*, mixing time-lapsed footage and material shot from a car speeding through the city. Like the coastal shot of Ireland, this is also something of a place-signalling cinematic cliché.
22. The *Achtung Baby/Zoo TV* period is too much of an aberration in the U2 oeuvre and a 'perversion' of Irish place, fashion and identity discourses to be discussed in detail here. However, for a fuller discussion of this period of the band's work and its relationship to the national, see Noel McLaughlin (2009; 2011).

23. If, as has been widely argued, *Don't Look Back* documented a Dylan arriving in an England not yet ready for him; *Rattle and Hum*, by contrast, goes out of its way to be America-friendly. In many ways, *Zoo TV: Outside Broadcast* has more in common with the Pennebaker film attitudinally, in the sense that it offered a U2 that parts of America might not have been ready for.
24. The series broke with its usual half-hour slot and devoted one hour to the band, which were at the height of their commercial success. It was studied with the type of revelatory material that the Hollywood film avoids, and left them looking exposed and naive. The Edge reduces punk and its complexities to people 'complaining all the time', and an uncomfortable Bono in a long take interview is probed about the band's ideology and values.
25. This was a point picked up by some reviewers at the time. For example, Wayne Robins claimed the film was 'a bit like *Easy Rider*' but 'without the drugs, motorcycles or Peter Fonda' (Robins 1988).
26. For a more in-depth discussion of *Under a Blood Red Sky* and the work trope in U2, see McLaughlin and McLoone (2011).

not-so-golden age (or 'un-Swinging' Britain). The visual style of *Rattle and Hum* reinforces this with its high contrast black-and-white, nostalgically echoing *Don't Look Back* (Pennebaker, 1967) and the 'authenticity' of the cinema *verité* of Don Pennebaker. However, in that film, the audience are treated to the 'cool' Bob Dylan wearing a series of performative masks: the charismatic Dylan; the cruel Dylan; the playful Dylan; the misogynistic Dylan and so forth (Bruzzi 2000; Negus 2008).²³ *Rattle and Hum*, though, is fairly circumspect in offering 'revelatory' material of the band in the conventional sense of creating space to construct and foreground character depth. This may be due to the band having being 'bitten', as it were, previously in a *World in Action* documentary profile (Greengrass, 1986).²⁴ In fact, what is striking – and perhaps *World in Action* was the catalyst for this – is just how little 'independent' (in the sense of not being directly controlled by the band) critical documentary work there is on U2 post-1987.

Moreover, as an example of the 'rock-band-on-tour film', *Rattle and Hum* has none of the rock 'n' roll clichés, such as the trashing of hotel rooms, televisions being thrown out of windows, wild parties, the presence of groupies, drugs and alcohol. There is little in the way of 'hanging around' or of a band caught off-guard, as with, say, The Rolling Stones in Robert Frank's 1972 tour film, *Cocksucker Blues*. In short, there is no 'conventional' rock 'n' roll excess (aside from Bono's mid-song graffiti-ing of the Vaillancourt Fountain in San Francisco). Indeed, *Cocksucker Blues* was as much a film about rock fashion as it was about excess; hence Cecil Beaton's fascination with The Stones' attire. *Rattle and Hum*, despite its attempts to make the band look heroic, did not attract the kind of attention from fashionistas as the texts it is indebted to, and there is little reference to *clothes-as-clothes* in review material.

There is also little sense of how the band relate to one another in an interpersonal fashion, and a related avoidance of wives and girlfriends (in the way that *Don't Look Back*, for instance, intimates at Dylan's complex relationship with Joan Baez). While it may seem admirable to avoid the clichés of the tour film, the problem, in a generic sense, is what to replace them with?²⁵ What the film elects to do instead of the rubric of excess is to focus on *performance as work* (and here it maintains the 'work trope' forged in *Under a Blood Red Sky*).²⁶ Hence, the emphasis on pre-tour rehearsals; practising with B.B. King's band; recording 'Angel of Harlem' in Sun Studios with the Memphis Horns, and so on. And there is a significance in all of this, as the emphasis on being hardworking cuts against one of the dominant stereotypes of the Irish – the tropes of laziness, indolence and drunkenness, and the connection between these and the poetic – which have been a feature of the representation of Irish 'creativity' (Campbell 2010: 95–100). *Rattle and Hum*, then, is a film driven as much by what it is not, and by what it seeks to studiously avoid. There is little sense of the characters that, together, comprise the band. It is also strangely audience-less, with individual audience members lost in the dark areas of the image, engulfed like the film noir protagonist in the pitch black created by the *chiaroscuro* (which is amplified by the absence of an often-used U2 concert device: an extended gangway into the crowd). Unlike *Under a Blood Red Sky*, moreover, there is little reciprocation of the singer's look. One is, therefore, left with a curious image: a band scared to reveal itself in a filmic form associated with the revelatory, and one that, in avoiding many of the narrative features of the touring film, look strangely one-dimensional. In fact, U2 effectively become the band that sought to save rock 'n' roll from sex and drugs and here they tap into that other strong tradition of representation of Ireland



Figure 3: Bono reads the lyrics for 'When Love comes to Town' to the self-deprecating B.B. King.

and the Irish: chastity and sexual propriety. In this sense, the band may be justly accused of actively sanitising the blues, stripping it of its clichéd place as the 'devil's music' (with the self-deprecating B.B. King, despite revealing more of himself verbally than the members of U2, being rendered strangely 'cuddly' [see Figure 3]). Equally oddly, this turn to the blues and rock's black American roots left U2 looking out-of-step, as if the band had no awareness of an earlier generation of Anglo-American rock acts who had appropriated its register.

While *Rattle and Hum* draws upon the aesthetics of the classic rockumentary, it is also marked by the desire to further the U2 'brand' image and maintain the visual style of the Corbijn's studied, high contrast black-and-white photography of the cover of *The Joshua Tree* and *Rattle and Hum* album sleeves. As Susan Fast (2008: 177) has noted 'black-and-white helps keep things simple', but it more complexly draws on the twin discourses offered by the style: first, documentary authenticity and the association of 'gritty' and grainy imagery with a down-at-heel rock authenticity; and second, art cinema, and art cinema's status as the 'cool' and 'serious' Other to 'mainstream', big-budget entertainment cinema. Indeed these discourses are supported by the minimalist design of the stage sets and the band's iconography. Bono, especially at this point, is offered as a mix of late nineteenth-century traveller/gypsy wanderer and Celtic warrior poet (Reynolds and Press 1995: 83). This reading is endorsed by Lola Cashman, the fashion co-ordinator on the tour (a figure perhaps more famous for being successfully sued by the band in 2006 for the failure to return items of clothing from that tour). Cashman claims that she self-consciously dressed Bono in a manner that reflected the two prominent sides of his character: the warrior Celt and the Irish poet (Cashman 2003: 139). The heavy textures of Bono's attire – the rustic fibres of his waistcoats, his knee-high boots and breeches (together with his long un-dyed and lank hair) – suggest a ruggedness and a nostalgia for the frontier and the old west; of gold-prospecting, open cast mining and the like, and the singer would hardly look out of place on *Deadwood* (Milch, 2004). At one point he even dons a cowboy hat (albeit with a certain irony). This, of course, forms a fit with the 'earthy', ochre-tinged images of the American mid-west offered in the lyrics: 'desert skies', 'dust clouds' and song titles such as 'Red Hill Mining Town', 'A Trip through Your Wires' and 'In God's Country'. However, the cummerbund Bono sports, partly works against the rugged pioneer aesthetic and invokes the gentlemanly and the aristocratic.

27. Certainly *The Joshua Tree/Rattle and Hum* period marked a more elegant fit between sound and image than the previous album and tour. While *The Unforgettable Fire* (Island, 1984) is a landmark U2 album sonically, exhibiting a greater use of texture and experimentation, it is arguably the worst period of the band's career in terms of dress, with Bono sporting his infamous 'mullet' hairstyle and an unflattering mix of leather trousers, knee-high suede boots and denim shirts.



Figure 4: Bono ceremoniously removes his cummerbund during the performance of 'Bad'.

28. For a fuller discussion of masculinity, performance and gender nostalgia, see Biddle (2007).

29. While U2 fans may, no doubt, find the rugged pioneer images erotic, they certainly do not conform to the conspicuously sexualized and chiselled frontier male bodies evident in the photography of Bruce Weber. However, as with Joy Division and the dark overcoat, the rural wanderer look was certainly extremely widely adopted throughout Ireland at the time and even permeated the world of Irish alcohol advertising. The look, though, was certainly not as widely appropriated across the Irish Sea.

Thus, while the aesthetic is clearly nostalgic, it suggests a combination of high and low culture, work and poetry; rootedness/ruggedness and the lofty (as well as a mix of 'Irish' and 'American' imagery).²⁷ It could be argued that Bono is offering a pre-Fordist image of masculinity – specifically of the Irish making their way in the American frontier of the nineteenth century – a semi-otic that, at least in part, functions as a nostalgic retreat from the uncertainties for masculine subjectivities in the post-Fordist present.²⁸ Once again, it seems, Irishness is associated with the pastoral and the pre-industrial, with clothes functioning less as 'fashion' or 'costume', than as ethnic wear. It is, therefore, especially significant that U2, in breaking with 'dressing themselves', employed a fashion co-ordinator to refine the look of unreconstructed authenticity; a paradigm case of fashion and artifice in the service of rock realism and (diasporic?) Irish authenticity. And, if Cashman's account is to be believed, she invested a great deal of labour combing the second-hand and vintage clothing stores in the towns and cities the band visited in order to consolidate the look.²⁹

The films intertwining of blackness and Irishness also attracted criticism. As Lauren Onkey has observed:

[...] declarations of black identity by the Irish or Irish Americans usually depend on essentialized notions of both blackness and Irishness; the point of making the alliance is to suggest that both groups share access to an authentic identity distinct from a dominant culture.

(Onkey 2006: 162)

This leads Onkey to go on to conclude that:

[...] the Irish can use African Americans as a tool to become authentically Irish, to get in touch with their authentic suffering, or their pre-colonial ethnic authenticity; but the definition of Irishness that emerges is as retrograde and limiting as depicting blacks as noble savages.

(Onkey 2006: 163)

Furthermore, in a later discussion of *Rattle and Hum*, Onkey claims that African American musical traditions are subject to the same nostalgic impulse as the other musical areas referenced, and thus securely quarantined in the past and rendered 'safe' (Onkey 2010: 159–68).

While all of this is may be true, it could be a little hard on U2, and the album/film may be more ideologically ambivalent than Onkey allows for. It may also inadvertently lend support to the type of English music press criticism of the period which, predictably enough, hammered the band for locating themselves in America (which of course was a synonym for big, bland and empty) and plundering the blues (and plundering it late). The album and film have been widely regarded as the band's critical low point (Stokes 2006: 84).³⁰

The nether side of the argument here is clearly articulated by the late Bill Graham, the Irish music press writer who could legitimately claim to have discovered the band. Graham consistently championed this period of the band's oeuvre in the face of critical hostility up to his death in 1996. He has astutely pointed to the Irish diasporic discourses of retrieval and recovery articulated in this work. In this sense, *Rattle and Hum*, as an album and a film, is concerned with exploring (and indeed developing) the connections between the blues and American country music and the Irish migrant ballad tradition; an intertwining that significantly played a formative part in the formation of rock 'n' roll, and is evident in Presley, Dylan and Hendrix and many of the other canonical figures referenced in the film (Graham 1988; 1995). This presents a more complex picture than the reductionist dismissal of the album/film in many quarters of the British and American music press, and one could conceivably argue, moreover, that U2 were never interested in fetishizing black American musical expression as the great outlaw libidinal 'Other', or in reproducing the sexualized 'bump 'n' grind' of The Rolling Stones' appropriation of the blues. Conversely, the band were focused on paying homage to the blues in a more cerebral fashion; of prising open and celebrating the Black/Irish-Atlantic musical dialogues involved.³¹ Therefore, *Rattle and Hum*, in part at least (and however clumsily), offers a very different kind of 'alterative heritage': an Irish-specific version (and one full of contradictions and tensions). As Dublin had little in the way of a place-based rock mythology to draw upon, the film constructs a migrant heritage, and a diasporic or 'in-between' space – a precursor of sorts to the BBC/RTÉ series *Bringing It All Back Home* (King, 1991) which explored these inter-cultural connections in a more thorough and systematic fashion.³²

CONCLUSION

Mobilising images of place in popular musical terms can be a fraught strategy. U2 had to, in a way, leave notional aspects of Irishness behind and move away from the dominant images of Ireland and Dublin (for example, *Rattle and Hum* contains only one short interlude in a Dublin pub with Adam Clayton drinking a pint of Guinness).³³ This explains why the city has largely been absent from visual representations of the band throughout the 1980s.³⁴ Dublin had little in the way of an elaborate scene mythology that could be appropriated and adapted. U2 could not draw on what Bill Graham has termed '(t)he Clash's tower block imagery' (Graham 1989: 16), nor on the lineage of little-Englandisms associated with The Kinks, The Smiths and Blur and so forth (nor could they tap into a national cinematic imaginary in the way that The Arctic Monkeys or The Smiths explicitly deployed images from the 'Angry Young Men' cycle). In this sense, U2 would have found it difficult

30. The film was not as universally dismissed as history would have one believe. The normal acerbic comedy writer Graham Linehan (co-author of *Father Ted* and *Black Books* and others) in his capacity as a *Hot Press* reviewer, confessed to finding Bono's performances vaguely erotic and the film 'moving' (Linehan 1989).

31. Criticizing the film for its nostalgia gaze is problematic as so much contemporary rock and pop references, either overtly or indirectly, rock's past; and second, and this a point explored by Paul Gilroy (2010), surely the downplaying of African American stereotypes and focusing on the utopian narratives of that period of African American musical expression – of civil rights and so forth – may have politically progressive consequences, as it avoids the 'bling' and the hyper-aggressive masculinity that was a dominant aspect of black musical expression in the late 1980s.

32. According to Stokes (2006: 85), Bono was disappointed in the critical reception of both film and album. The impulse behind them had been to respond to accusations that the band's audience, in Eamonn McCann's words, was 'almost entirely white, overwhelmingly middle-class, as content as a field of flowers and no threat whatsoever to anything' (McCann 1987: 302), and with values as 'American as apple pie' (Bradby 1989: 110).

33. U2, even early on were largely non-drinkers, regarding the world of pubs and alcohol as

markers of mediocrity (something they shared with Bob Geldof). This distance from drinking culture had a twofold aspect: first, pubs, from a sub-cultural perspective, were regarded as part of the majority experience and hence uncool; second, the world of the Dublin/Irish pub was a national cliché and to be avoided.

34. The exceptions here are the early publicity photographs of the band by Hugo McGuinness and others (see Graham 1989), and the music video for 'Gloria' (October, 1981), with the latter making use of a similar docklands location as *Rattle and Hum*.
35. It is also worth noting here that the more modest budgets and aesthetic traditions of public service British television can create a more kinetic, visceral and exciting concert experience than the Hollywood concert film.

to mobilize an Irish equivalent tradition of self-deprecation, introspection; a focus on the minutia of national institutions or a Ballard-style science fiction Dublin. This, in part, reveals not so much a desire to avoid Irish signifiers, as an attempt to re-imagine and re-vitalize them. The band's affirmative ideology and anthemic sound, as well as their avoidance of the tropes of Irish hedonism (which have in the past been easily articulated to rock mythology) signals a move away from some of the widely circulating myths about Ireland and the Irish in popular media. Moreover, as John Waters has put it, U2 have denied 'the fatalism in the Irish personality' and the association of the Irish with a history of suffering (Waters 1994: 194). However, 1983's *Under a Blood Red Sky* is arguably the more successful as it avoids the 'rear-view mirrorism' and overt referentiality of its later and bigger budget Hollywood counterpart. However, *Rattle and Hum*, despite its problems, forges an imaginative cultural geography of Irish, British and American elements (even if these are anchored by a strong pastoral discourse, frontier costumes and circumspection about revealing too much). U2 are perhaps at their best when they do not speak but play. And love them or loathe them, the music is distinctive, even majestic and powerful.³⁵

Control does little to work away from post-punk Manchester's association with miserablism, and aside from the expert recreation of the music in performance, the film is hampered by the traditions of working-class realism and the rock biopic. Significantly, Simon Reynolds has offered a much more insightful analysis of the film than his academic Film Studies counterparts (Reynolds 2009b: 358–66). This is because he understands the music and its affective power, and is sensitive to any attempt to reduce the band's distinctive music and performance to conventions of narrative and genre or the bounded rubric of place. In part, *Control* succeeds as documentary drama, recreating and amalgamating scenes from regional television, or reconstructing scenes where the camera was not present. (In fact, it is the type of dynamic and 'immediate' live performances on terrestrial television that provide the primary material for re-creation.) By contrast, in *Rattle and Hum* the openness of both the filmic and lyrical imagery, its *vagueness*, works against anchoring the music to a clear narrative 'explanation' and hence helps, to a degree, to maintain the notional listener's interpretative and affective liberty. Whichever way, most commentators on both films tend to overlook the significance of clothes. One can imagine the different meanings Joy Division would articulate if they were dressed in U2's attire.

With regard to place specifically, footballing analogies may be helpful. In popular musical terms, Manchester functions a little like Manchester United and stands atop of an imaginary league table of fashionable rock and popular musical cities. Like its football club counterpart (with a legacy from 'Busby's Babes' through to George Best and the Swinging Sixties to Eric Cantona), popular musical Manchester has a long history of significant events, celebrated fashion styles and canonical figures. Dublin, especially in the early 1980s, could be likened to the Irish football league: it attracts little interest outside of the island (and even then by supporters within the Irish diaspora). If Manchester bands had to carve out a place-based identity against the power of London, emphasising the range of its 'northern-ness', its industrial heritage and so forth, Dublin's aspiring musicians faced a double-disadvantage. Like Manchester they had to deal with London's gravitational pull, but they had to negotiate the existing paradigm of ethnic Irish Otherness (literary and working-class pubs, traditional music sessions and their associated attire, Gaelic sports, 'Celtic' imagery and so forth). Dublin also suffered from the

lack of British music and fashion press interest in the specificities of its scene and the swamping of the city's identity by tropes of ethnicity. After all, Dublin has been associated internationally with (popular) music much longer than Manchester. More simply put, Irish rock artists such as U2 had to find a space in-between foregrounding and denying Irish place/identity discourses. At the time of the band's emergence, Irish folk/rock hybrids and the images and looks with which they were associated had ossified into cliché, leaving U2 having to find a different 'space' in the authenticity/hybridity dialectic³⁶ (and finding a clothing style that signified a distinctive yet uncliché 'Irishness' was no simple task).

In both U2 and Joy Division we can glimpse the complex ways in which tropes of place – of origins, belonging and locatedness – are mobilized. It is difficult to side-step entirely the rhetoric of origins and the bounded notions of identity to which they give rise; after all bands/film-makers are not global or wholly transnational in the way that banks are, and thus they cannot simply withdraw from anchorage in city/nation configurations (and seemingly at will). In political economic terms, U2, in their circumvention of London had to construct a hinterland between the United States, Ireland and Britain. In this sense, the band had to refashion the pejorative spatial term 'mid-Atlantic'. Thus the band had to simultaneously hold onto the residual advantages of Irishness and their Dublin base, and refresh and re-imagine these tropes of place and identity. Similarly, Joy Division's musical work is more *geographically* (and fashionably) imaginative than the image offered by *Control*, which is hemmed in by both the Manchester myth they had helped to consolidate and the cinematic conventions deployed in the posthumous biopic. In a sense, Manchester's centrality in the Joy Division story is overstated; whereas U2's relationship to their city of origin is under-elaborated.

In the contemporary context, however, the two lead singers seem to endure as contrasting yet mutually dependent archetypes: the poetic, yet misguided urban martyr/shaman; and the bombastic and driven, and primarily rural, saviour or 'prophet of positive thinking'. Whichever way one leans, both bands and singers in the period discussed stand out against the current climate of acquisition and consumer-driven status.

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36. Even an analyst as insightful as Simon Reynolds contributes to Dublin's 'unknown' status. His account of post-punk (Reynolds 2005) is largely organized in terms of cities and an assumed correspondence between musical style and the specificities of place. What is ideologically interesting though is the blatant lack of critical consideration of Dublin/Ireland in relation to U2, whom he describes as the most commercially successful group in the entire movement (Reynolds 2009a).

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