



National College of Art and Design

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Sculpture and Expanded Practice, Fine Art.

Verbal Revolution and the Language of the Oppressed
Language and Class - From *Beat* to *Flow*

Elayne Harrington.

Submitted to the School of Visual Culture in Candidacy for the Degree of Elayne Harrington
International BA(Hons), Critical Cultures, 2019.



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I declare that this **Critical Cultures Research Project** is all my own work and that all sources have been fully acknowledged.

Signed: Elayne Harrington

Programme / department: International BA(Hons), Sculpture and Expanded Practice, Critical Cultures, Fine Art.

Date: 28th January 2019.

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Introduction

The purpose of my research is to interrogate verbal culture in the context of class with specific focus on Dublin, Ireland. The vital issues that will be covered are such representations within mainstream media and contemporary cultures. I will address the distorted and select portrayal of class as demonstrated through dialect and cultural linguistic proclivity. The research will provide an opportunity to question the perennial ill use of the working class face and voice.

The problem of internalised classist ideation will be addressed. In order to narrow the discourse appropriately, the focus will rest on language and dialect in relation to modern Irish poetry and examples of mainstream entertainment which rest heavily on the verbal. Some of the questions I will pose include: who gets to say what the truth of a people is, how is that achieved, whose voice is heard, favoured or despised over others and has this evolved over time? Have attitudes been rehabilitated since *Punch*, or has the modern Irish poet, producer or writer become a master of self-deprecation unto himself?

Chapter One ‘Words and Voices of Poetic Revolution - *Fad or Function?*’ will address the Beat Generation, related social shifts and the current Irish poetic turn, including the ‘spoken word’ scene. I will use the example of the modern Irish poets voice to offer insight into particular poetic approaches which will enlarge upon the topic of authorship. Examples of the work of Paula Meehan and Karl Parkinson will inform the analysis, adding a

diverse comparison regarding use of poetic voice. A study of 'Nostalgie de La Boue' will be covered and how appropriation of the working-class extends beyond verbal plagiarism.

In Chapter Two 'Misrepresentation in the Mainstream Media - *Putting Words in The Mouths of the Poor*' I will discuss the issue of inaccuracy and ignorance to the nuances of real proletarian lives through class ventriloquising. This will drive the discourse toward the psychology of stereotyping in mainstream entertainment. The problem of popular culture and its lack of poetic portrayal of the working-class experience will be probed. The proposal is to impart a reform of conscientiousness within the institution, art, entertainment and the media, thus impact the community at large.

Chapter One

Words and Voices of Poetic Revolution - *Fad or Function?*

This chapter will cover the Beat Generation and an overview of how some of the elements of that literary turn correspond with aspects of the Irish modern poetry scene. I will discuss the concept of voice and its manifestation as exemplified in current Irish poetic work. A ‘compare and contrast’ of poetry will develop points around how the poet exploits their power of voice. I will interpret *nostalgie de la boue* - romanticising of accent and identity associated with the lower-classes. Interrogating the perceived fun and fashion of this will underpin the attitudes which sustain oppression and the class system. Notes from Franco “Bifo” Berardi’s ‘The Uprising - *On Poetry and Finance*’ will underscore these arguments throughout.

1.1

Beat Culture and the Irish Poet - Literary Inheritance

In ways the current era of poetic representation on the island of Ireland echo that of Beat poetry and its culture. This largely radical literary era assigned significant value to the distinct language of Beat. Let us consider the example in William S. Burroughs *Junky*, where the author analyses Beat terminology:

Hip - Someone who knows the score. Someone who understands "jive talk." Someone who is "with it." The expression is not subject to definition because, if you don't "dig" what it means, no one can ever tell you. (Burroughs, 1953, p. 155).

This quote shows Burrough’s explicit sense of Beat lingo, of the language of his time speaking in terms unique to the cultural and social epoch. The proposition is that the pioneers of the Beat Generation had an awareness of their verbal distinctions. The words had pure

function, not only serving their fundamental purpose, to indicate or describe. There was a subversive role encompassed within the very words. Paradoxically, the words carry the poet, the society, the movement but the poet carries the meaning, the individual translates the revolution and what it represents. “Poetry plays a game of activating the social body.” (Berardi. 2012, p. 36). The language of Beat was empowering and it was consciously translated to a socio-cultural dialect. It gave the Beat writing and poetry its novel quality and particular tone. In Ann Charter's collection of poems, protests, attacks, and apologies we see how, through language and attitude The Beat Generation influenced the world. This can easily be seen, particularly through the beatnik motif that has been appropriated in mainstream culture since its emergence. Judy Funnie from Jim Jenkins’ animated TV series *Doug* is supposed to be a typecast beatnik. Even in the still below taken from the 1991 episode ‘Doug Can’t Dig It’, what Broyard describes is apparent; the beatnik, cutting the world down to size, reducing it to a small stage with a few props and a curtain of jive. (Charters, 2001, p. 43). But the issue of mainstream representation can be reductive and problematic, which will be addressed later.



Figure 1: Judy Funnie from the animated series *Doug* created by Jim Jenkins. Season 5, Episode: *Doug Can't Dig It*. 1991 Directed: Yvette Kaplan. Written by: Ken Scarborough.

Charters includes an apt expansion on the description of the beatnik by critic and columnist Anatole Broyard, in his writing: *A Portrait of the Hipster* he states:

He was the illegitimate son of the Lost Generation,
the hipster was really *nowhere*...
The hipster began his inevitable quest for self-definition...
he was forced to *formalize* his resentment and express it *symbolically*,
the hipster harmonized or reconciled himself with his society. (Charters, 2001, p. 43).

Let us parallel the hipster of Beat with the spoken word poet of Poetic Dublin - the modern bard. As Broyard implies, the hipster was aware of his being 'nowhere' as a result of his past and his cultural predisposition. It can be seen that from this knowledge came the urge to define his being and this required action - action in the form of a "developed language describing the world as seen through the hipster's eyes." (Charters, 2001, p. 43). The Irish modern poets, like the Beats formed their own modes of verbal exchange and developed a scene to accompany the new wave of poetry. Today's poets of Ireland have a strong relationship with heritage and it translates in their work. They also express a hunger for emancipation from the bondage of tradition, just as their Beat relatives did.

Words and senses wanted to escape the frame of representation, of denotation and of naturalistic reproduction. So the word and the sense started to invent a new world of their own, rather than reflect or reproduce existing reality. (Berardi, 2012).

Berardi's statement reflects the urgency of word and voice in serving their poetic function to ultimately arouse enlightenment, egalitarianism and emancipation. The same voice is trying to assert itself within modern Ireland, against the din of the formal language of capitalism, state negligence and corruption. Indeed, the class system is linked with the monetary language which Berardi refers to. The government serves the middle-class and in turn is privileged over the poor, regardless of how gifted any member of the latter may be. It is interesting to consider the notion of 'money talks' here, in that Berardi argues: "poetry, the hidden resource is the language of nonexchangeability." (2012).



Figure 2: Photograph of the founders of the Beat Generation. From left to right: Hal Chase, Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg and William S. Burroughs, Morningside Heights, 1944, by Allen Ginsberg Trust/Courtesy Fahey Klein Gallery, Los Angeles.

Just as the Dublin poets of today revolt creatively, sharing their disillusion with Ireland's past and present with poetic dissent, the Beats were rooted in the reality of Western civilisation yet awakened to the liberty of a poetic interpretation of the experience of being *beat*, beat down or oppressed. Some among many of the Irish Beats of today include Karl Parkinson and Paula Meehan.

The Modern Bard and Aural Autonomy

Karl Parkinson's 2013 *Litany of the City and other poems* features a work described by the author as a performance hip hop poem. *Danger Dessie - A Hip hop Ballad* describes the life of a gangster in poetic form and the likes of which had never been published before in Ireland. (Parkinson, 2017). Parkinson asserts aspects of his own identity in giving voice to 'Dessie'. The matter-of-factly punctuated style offers a sense of the bleakness and system bound existence of the principle figure.

Me brother died
 he had an accident in prison
 fell down the spiral stairs in the joy
 or maybe he was pushed?
 Guards didn't give a fuck about the likes of him
 so no need to investigate
 case closed
 ashes to ashes
 dust to dust
 (Parkinson, 2013.)

The semi-phonetic form makes the author's voice audible. It is a monologue that allows relief only for the sing-song chorus intervals. Although the aloofness and cynicism only offer a superficial sense of being set at ease, ending with a candid, run of the mill threat. The Dublin dialect alterations are marked in bold in the next example. It is interesting to note that the building of the narrative through the colloquial tongue employs more omission than ornamentation. This brevity exudes confidence - the confidence of the poet on page and that of the character and the message.

Yes I'm danger Dessie,
ye mighta seen me on the telly
when they took me **out the** courts and put me in a van
headed straight to the can
I'm danger Dessie
If you fuck with me that's when the shit gets heavy
found out who done it
put his name on a bullet...
they say what I done was wrong
but the street says I'm right
fuck em
I'm glad he's dead
I couldn't give a shite (Parkinson, 2013.)

The short and sharp verbal jabs, the casual fluidity of the statements in each stanza have a present-tense air. The narrative uses repeated combinations, a flurry of blows to each sense. The syntactic flow is sequential and oddly lulling. The orator's account is perpetual like a prison sentence, deathless like the working-class struggle. Aptly, Berardi says "poetry is the here and now of the voice, of the body, and of the word, sensuously giving birth to meaning." (2012, p. 21). The now-ness and permanence of incarceration paradoxically free Dessie's song and pause time, as he shifts back and forth from then and now. The proletariat plight will not go away and now it rears its criminal head from behind bars in the form of voice. The reader is simply a visitor protected by the perspex shield of class. Cocksure, astute and attuned to the canon of the street, it laughs at the law in the same manner the poet dismisses the laws of language. Dessie makes a point of relaying how the system has failed him and his brother. He takes control as the poet does, together they liberate the unheard voice whilst granting the reader their prejudices. He takes ownership of his identity and demonstrates authority in how he brandishes his bitterness like shank of scorn. His voice, so often hijacked by tabloids and television, the thieves to the poetry of his life who stifle the chance for meaning. He gets there before them, he tells them who he is, who they think he is and always

will be. Parkinson, the proletarian poet gives the Irish working-class male delinquent devil licence to sing his anti-social song and in that extends that voice to the ears of broader society. Ears that are more often tuned in when the lower-classes are destroying themselves and each other.



Figure 3: Jordan, J. (2016). *New portraits of Irish writer and poet Karl Parkinson - John Jordan Photography.*

The working class voice sings a quieter song and it speaks of home and place. Paula Meehan's poetic work: *The Pattern* from *Mysteries of the Home* (2013) starts with a sense of humble heritage, immediately denoting generational poverty. It commences with a gently percussive thread of items that can be imagined listed on one hand, each to a finger;

Little has come down to me of hers,
a sewing machine, a wedding band,
a clutch of photos,

The rhythm gives way;

the sting of her hand
across my face in one of our wars
when we had grown bitter and apart.
(Meehan, 2013)

This is a jarring departure from the former lighter notions of maternal inheritance. Meehan invites the reader to her history and reality, but at a cost. The reader must commit to feeling the throes of poverty and is thus drawn into the ambiguity of this. The work does not allow the reader to escape the complexity of the working class experience. Parkinson's character suggests a partially satirical approach to outlining similar grievances of place and class. But this poetic voice speaks with a different accent. Although working class lives may not be plentiful materially, what the poems are expressing is a richness in sensuous meaning, as Berardi says when talking on poetry and finance. (2012, p. 22). The sense of value is portrayed in the description of inheritance of meaning and understanding. Berardi talks about the voice and poetry as two strategies for reactivation. (2012, p. 20). Meehan uses her power of voice to relay details that inspire high regard, wonder and sympathy, rather than affirm the ugliness of poverty in its most desperate form.

First she'd scrub the floor with Sunlight soap,
an arm reach at a time. When her knees grew sore
she'd break for a cup of tea, then start again
at the door with lavender polish. The smell
would percolate back through the flat to us,
her brood banished to the bedroom.

As she buffed the wax to a high shine
did she catch her own face coming clear?
Did she net a glimmer of her true self?
Did her mirror tell what mine tells me?

I have her shrug and go on
knowing history has brought her to her knees.
(Meehan, 2013)

Meehan uses her mother's cleaning to open up to hindsight. Her questions pose the love of a child grown wise enough to see herself in her mother. This reflection harmonises their mutual but differing struggles, thus deepening their shared identity. To see herself, Meehan observes her mother from memory. She presents the working class body - the face, hands, arms and knees, the humanity. The reader is permitted to experience a sensorial moment in a working class setting, the olfactory, the taste, dexterity, sight and beauty. This allows the poetry and intricacy of poverty to prevail. The identity sees itself without the aid of the ego in seeing its self conscious shame:

I wore that dress
with little grace. To me it spelt poverty,
the stigma of the second hand...

Sizing up the world beyond our flat patch by patch
daily after school, and fitting each surprising
city street to city square to diamond. I'd watch
the Liffey for hours pulsing to the sea
and the coming and going of ships,
certain that one day it would carry me
to Zanzibar, Bombay, the Land of the Ethiops. (Meehan, 2013).

These lines are telling of the desire to shed roots, to repress rather than boast the symptoms of the lower class identity. Meehan's poem expresses longing and resentment. In the former example, our Hip-hop balladeer does not want to explore. Dessie does not venture for a destiny. He will fight only for what he values - a different type of justice. Meehan's reality takes us further than Parkinson's hero can. Her truth shows "the reactivation of the emotional body and therefore the reactivation of social solidarity, all which starts from the reactivation of the desiring force of enunciation." (Berardi, 2012, p. 20). The poem sees her escape her limitations, whereas Danger Dessie stays where the reader expects him to be. He has not used the power of the enunciation of his accounts of memory and experience to incite social solidarity.

Blackface to 'Nostalgie de La Boue' - Rubbing it in the Poor's Face

To discuss the fetishisation of working class culture I will illustrate the case of *nostalgie de la boue* through its suspected presence within the Beat movement. I will detail how it translates to this generation in the attitude and fancied realism which the modern creative class usurp. An interesting criticism of the Beat generation in an issue of *Life* notices this 'nostalgia for mud', this dirty-on-purpose, beat looking but not *beat down* illusion. In 1959 staff writer Paul O'Neill wrote on the privileged, plastic beatnik:

...Around this bohemian cadre wanders a second group - an increasing corps of amateur or weekend Beats who have jobs and live the comfortable square life but who seek the "cool" state of mind, spread the Beat message and costume themselves in old clothes to ape the genuinely unwashed on Saturday nights. (O'Neill, 1959)

This accusation of the Beat movement could be cast against today's creative class. Taking the Art institution for example, which from university to gallery consists primarily of the middle-class. If a consequence of class is a lack of exposure to arts, education and varied cultural experience this posits the sociological basis from where 'poor face' is also sprung. Today's creative class can be seen to be standing on the shoulders of their proletarian counterparts.

Not surprisingly, financial exigency and government involvement in funding has heightened interest in the composition of art publics. Criticised by civil-rights groups and radicals as elitist and exhorted by government agencies and some members of their own ranks to serve a cross section of the public, managing directors of institutions have recently undertaken hesitant efforts to broaden their traditionally high status audiences to include racial minorities and white collar and blue collar audiences. (Dimaggio and Useem, 1978)

The former and latter quotes give a clear sense of privilege from a systematic and educational angle as well as from the psychosocial point of view. Whether in cultural movements, activism or the academic institution poverty is being purported as something it is not - a

choice, something to experiment with or ‘try on for size’. The middle-class enjoy the fruits of working-class heritage and lifestyle whilst maintaining a comfortable distance from the very real pain associated with being of the lower-class. George Orwell said: “Look at any number of *Punch* in the last thirty years, the working class person, as such, is a figure of fun, then he ceases to be fun and becomes a demon.” (1983, p. 116). Today, this translates to the polarity with which accent received - a strong Dublin accent is revered the world over yet when it comes to close encounters with a working class individual whose lives the privileged class do not understand the accent becomes a source of fear and despise. This is reflected in a major historical factor that must be considered in light of class appropriation: *Blackface* - the roots of which reach to historical racial mimicry via minstrel devices such as ventriloquized dialect and racial burlesque. (Lott, 1992.) The traits of the trend are clear in the 1927 American musical film *The Jazz Singer*.



Figure 4: Still from the film *The Jazz Singer* (1927), directed by Alan Crosland.

With this in mind, I will, again, regard language and class, drawing attention to the notion of identity and ownership. After some findings around two major Dublin accents as described by Raymond Hickey as a contribution to a 2015 article: *The Worst Accents In Ireland* for The

Irish Sun, a quote ensued: “the North Dublin accent is hard to listen to, especially on the 13 bus to Ballymun.” (The Sun, 2015). This suggests select Reviewing what has been addressed, the honest representation of poverty through Meehan’s *The Pattern* is helpful because it does not contribute to the stereotyping of the working class in modern poetry in Ireland. It proves the value of authentic presentation of life against satirising typecasts of working class cultures, which can be seen in Karl Parkinson’s *Danger Dessie*.

The romanticising of poverty has been put under scrutiny in various forms over time. In Tom Wolfe’s 1987 novel *The Bonfire of the Vanities* he depicts 1980s New York City one of his yuppie characters, a rich stockbroker rejoicing at his lover’s downtown apartment. “How bohemian! How...*real* this place was! Maria’s one room with a closet for a kitchen. It was all real! Squalid! New York! A rush of fire in the loins!” Wolfe had coined his ‘nostalgia for mud’ term in his 1971 novel *Radical Chic*. The same mode of critiquing class and race issues of New York could be used to challenge the class issues in Dublin, Ireland. Sadly, the satire is not yet as progressive and tends to lean heavily on the stereotype figure which will be covered further on. Opinion, prejudice, attraction or aversion to a voice, a face, a collective, a community must be interrogated further in order to critique how compartmentalising of a perceived character in association with specific traits, such as accent can be reductive and all too convenient to allow the sensuous meaning of the poetry of the proletariat to flow freely. (2012, p. 22). Deepening the study of appropriation, I will begin to look at ethical issues related to representation of the working class.

Chapter Two

Misrepresentation in the Mainstream Media - *Putting Words in The Mouths of the Poor*

Chapter two will carry out an evaluation of the disfigurement of the working class through common forms of character assassination in current mainstream media in Ireland. When dissecting classism in culture and entertainment, I will consider why some work is beneficial to the working class and other forms add to an already pervasive distrust and contempt for the oppressed class. With supporting theories from novelist and critic George Orwell alongside Bell Hooks, a vital source within the field of emancipatory learning will imagine radical education and egalitarian orientation being imparted across the fields of media, entertainment and verbal culture.

2:1

Parody Versus Satire - Fool Still in the Stocks

Our modern lives are brimming with presumptuous and false portrayals of desolation, ineptitude, idiocy and immorality within the lower classes. The broader community is all too familiar with what Dublin poet Colm Keegan refers to as ‘the modern clown’ - the ‘junkie’, or, ethically worded: ‘active drug addict’. Portrayals of those afflicted by drug dependency like *Adam and Paul* serve as more feeling and broadly conscious depiction of a painful reality misunderstood by so many. Writer Mark O’Halloran presented an equitable picture of the desperation of heroin addiction and showed diplomacy in the way in which he narrated the characters and their anguish. Not to say the realisation of the active addict should be as a

romanticised figure of working class disaster. My point is that the attention to the nuances and complexities of the working class struggle, as manifested in addiction within this work, serves the humanity of the real people that these characters imitate and therefore honour human life. It is a success in the same way that Danny Boyle succeeded in the adaptation of Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting*. In both productions, we see many angles, not just the one that affirms the widespread mindset so permeated by bigotry and the attitude of what Orwell had been taught, articulated as simply: "The lower classes smell." (Orwell, 1937, p. 119).



Figure 5 : Still from the film *Adam and Paul* (2004), directed by Lenny Abrahamson.

Joe McGucken and David McDermott of *The Windup Merchantz* are a Dublin comedy sketch crew. One of their videos entitled *Junkie's Christmas Carol* represents an active drug addict making diary-type disclosures, with the narration executed in an internal monologue fashion. What could be considered a perverted way of getting into the actual mind of the homogenous 'junkie' typecast they have employed. He sits on a spot that in reality does actually host many homeless folk who are truly tapping ('begging') in Dublin city centre. The video reserves little to no dignity for our nameless character, who is simply introduced on social media with: "our junky pal...tag a junky."

After recommending George Orwell's *Road to Wigan Pier* in the comments section of the public video I commented:

Very saddening. Mocking those afflicted by addiction. Having a laugh at the sore expense of vulnerable people in our society. Dragging people heads through the dirt having them swooning over this and condoning it as 'entertainment'. Wrapping up this toxic parody as 'humorous', as "sure it's just a laugh." Appropriating our people and parodying our grievances to feed it back to a demographic that knows no better than to swallow it whole. We're not the butt end of your joke. This contributes to class atrocity.

Other retorts from members of the public include: "Low blows. Walk a mile in their shoes.", "You don't get it? Make a video about disabled people, obese people and don't forget different races - that will be 'observation' too." and "I love laughing at junkies - their fault. Everyone knows what happens when you touch drugs. You turn into a Junkie." There are strong tones of empathy and solidarity but hatred too. Apparently it is natural and just that victims of poverty suffer. The response from one of the creators - the main actor in the one-man massacre is: "Orwell - an upper class novelist's commentary on pre World War 2, Northern English working class society, is a harsh and inimitable comparison to a short sketch based on a day in the life of a drug addict."

It is not surprising that the suggestion of reading a book in order to better understand my argument was rejected. The value in endorsing Orwell's approach resides in the fact that his strategy was, in fact much more than commentary. It was empathetic action. Orwell was a lower-upper-middle class man who admitted his approach was to personally discern the conditions of the unemployed English working class by living amongst them. This was in order to determine if he was in favour of Socialism or not, depending on how bad the situation was. All the while he documented every detail in order to truthfully record lower class misery and hold a mirror to the hierarchy. This is critical activism. The insertion of

vacuous turns of phrase and manufactured words uttered in the supposed privacy of the caricatures mind - this is autocratic, not observational.

The actor defends his standing and suggests I am: ‘hypercritical, tunnel-visioned, looking too deep into something that's not there’. He asks me if I found *Adam and Paul* offensive. The fact of comparing this sketch to the former work which encompassed “some nods to Beckett and Laurel and Hardy” is rather telling in and of itself. (Bradshaw, 2005). This shows that the incisive quality and attentive sensitivity exhibited in creating *Adam and Paul* has been overlooked. Imagining they are akin reveals that the trope or typecast is solely what has spoken to the interpreter. In *Junkie’s Christmas Carol* parody has outshone the sensuous poetry of the modern white and Auguste clown of satire. Our ‘junky pal’ is not observational, although the author did assure me in another exchange it was purely this and not a parody. *The Junky’s Christmas* by William S. Burroughs is a 1993 claymation which depicts Danny, “a poor unfortunate junkie who reveals his last remains of selflessness and humanity despite his urgent physical predicament.” (Dixon, 2011). Burrough’s junkie character even has a name, in spite of being made of clay. Danny has been written about and is considered with humanity as Burroughs narrates the story of this authentic caricature.

2:2

Perpetuating the ‘Skanger’ Stereotype - *How to Stifle the Stock Character’s True Voice*

The Irish are known for having a great ability to laugh at themselves. It is not uncommon that the very subject matter of such ‘jokes’ (in the form of classist parody, etc) are either alienated and/or humiliated by it. They may be offended too. Offense is a natural signifier that something is wrong or immoral and for some reason, working class Irish are expected to take it on the chin. One could argue this stems from a resilience built over time from the patience and long suffering acquired through the Roman Catholic Church and *Punch*, which recurrently featured Paddy Irishman throughout the ages. The working class Irish are the punchline of the joke and the engagement with these corrosive forms of entertainment is a result of internalised classism and poor shaming. The mainstream may be loved, as one loves their abuser, but the love is not equal in return. The victim-blaming attitude of the rich leaves the poor to shoulder the responsibility of winning back their own honour, as if they had waived it in the first place. Laughter or engagement is not consent.

Owen Jones suggests that what we see on TV is for the middle classes. In his book *Chavs*, he reports: “Eastenders scriptwriter David Yallop argues that it is ‘created by middle class people with middle-class view of the working-class which is patronizing, idealistic and untruthful’.” (2011, p. 132). In the Irish National broadcaster Raidió Teilifís Éireann (RTÉ) wardrobe there is a section where boxes of props and costumes are categorised:

‘Chavs’/‘skangers’, ‘slappers’/‘sluts’. The Cambridge Dictionary describes the informal term ‘skanger’ as ‘an insulting word for someone, usually a young person, whose way of dressing, speaking, and behaving is thought to show their lack of education and low social class.’

I want to use another example to highlight how anti-traveller sentiment is encouraged alongside class hatred. The *Damo & Ivor* movie was produced by Ruth Carter. The feature film was developed from the TV comedy series and, unsurprisingly it is an RTÉ broadcast too. Carter said that John Joe, a traveller character had previously appeared in the series and they received nothing but positive comments about him in the movie. She explains how "in the film, when John Joe discovers he is not a member of the Travelling Community, he is absolutely devastated." (Byrne, 2018). As if this is supposed to conciliate and amend harm already caused.

This is a common and very mislead attitude where someone attempts to condone insulting or degrading material, acts, notions or situations by coming up with their own logic in order to absolve themselves of guilt and essentially get away with it, whilst convincing the victims and their sympathisers that it is in fact a compliment, a joke or 'harmless fun.' Public work should serve all the public. It is curious whether Travellers were ever included in the conversation about how they felt about such representation. John-Joe being volatile and rotten toothed is a blatantly derogatory typecast of a Traveller. Public work should serve all the public. "Interdependency and accountability for the collectiveness of all citizens is the foundation of any truly democratic and just society." (Hooks, 2000, P. 129). Despite the damaging content of this production it was supported by the Irish Film Board, RTÉ and the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland.



Figure 6: Still from *Damo & Ivor The Movie* (2017), directed by Rob Burke and Ronan Burke.

Middle-class people, specifically the middle-class saturated creative class and wealthy business bodies in entertainment seem convinced of an entitlement to represent others who they have no connection with or respect for. This is visible in RTÉ and The British Broadcasting Corporation(BBC). *Little Britain* co-creator Matt Lucas calls his personifications ‘observations’. Keeping in mind, this is also the term used by the *Junkie’s Christmas Carol* creator. He believes the characters accurately represent the people they are supposed to be. “...if the observation rings true and it is funny, then why should it matter who is making the observation and what their background is?” (2011, cited in Jones, p. 128). Political commentator and columnist Owen Jones points out that Matt Lucas and David Williams are two ex-private school boys dressing up as working-class single mothers. (2011, p. 127). Is the public convinced by the premise that these works are observational? The creators certainly are.

In music in Ireland *The Rubberbandits*, a Limerick hip hop comedy duo have also enjoyed the fruits of their skill in appropriating the working-class trope into the mainstream. Rapping is one of four traditional elements within hip hop. The style of oration in the songs is classed as rap. Although, the comedic style in which the vocals are executed does not correspond with the principles of 'flow.' This term, which has its origins in Bronx-born hip hop has recently emerged within the Irish hip hop and spoken word scene. 'Flow' denotes rhythm, rhyme, cadence and delivery. (Edwards, 2012). Rap is the expression of vocal skills executed with power and stamina, breath control, use of language, formulation of phrases/words with special attention paid to content. Arguably, *The Rubberbandits* parodic style does not exhibit many of these qualities and is reductive, especially in the context of the lyrical. Their themes and use of language can be problematic regarding who is targeted by the subject matter.

Seeing the name of the cultural movement of hip hop parallel to what Blindboy Boatclub and Bobby Chrome create attests to the fact that the creative class harbour an entitlement to appropriate wherever they see fit. The mainstream portrayal of hip hop has much to answer for in how it has engaged with Hip hop originators since its emergence in the late 1970s. The issue of appropriation is apt here and it is the fault of the media that the contemporary image of the underground art form is that of misogyny and money. (Anon, 2015). There appears to be little concern of the negative ramifications caused by acting contrary to the values which actually established hip hop. Comedy hip hop or satirical hip hop is considered a subgenre of hip hop. This creates an issue since hip hop is not of itself a genre. The problem resides in a diminishing of principle in favour of humour, profit and prestige. In such work, it is not clear where homage is paid or where honour is served to the integrity of hip hop as a politic, conscientious and comprehensive art movement.

Lyrics in *The Rubberbandits* first single *Horse Outside* refer to the Thomas Street locality in Dublin and its identity which is strongly connected to horse culture. The story is of a male wedding attendee trying to seduce a maid of honour with the conviction that his horse is a more favourable mode of transport than the fancy cars owned by other men in attendance. The song opens with a man giving a message to the couple to be wedded. “Don’t be afraid to have a few house parties even if there’s children involved. I was reared in a house like that - drinking and drugging going on. It didn’t do me any harm.” This sets the audience up for what type of people are being introduced. It is apparent in society that these afflictions predominantly impact the lower-classes - addiction, family dysfunction, neglect. It could be said that this is a hurtful, unhelpful reference that demeans those who are affected in this way and that it perpetuates a damaging reputation.

The implication of a lack of concern regarding ‘drinking and drugging’ is supposed to give the impression that these people, this character’s parents are barbaric and unprincipled and the viewer is meant to see this parental incompetence or irresponsibility as obnoxious yet simultaneously funny. The obvious problem of naming a specific street is that the view portrayed is being associated with that place. Some initial shots include the bride who is chewing gum and two bridesmaids who bear scowls, large sleeper earrings, one with a leopard print bra visible from under her garish dress and both also chew gum during the ceremony. It is clear that stereotypes are being employed here to quickly get across the message that these characters are ghastly and trashy which is intended to make the work funnier.

The Rubberbandits - David Chambers and Bobby McGlynn “hail from middle-class backgrounds in Limerick city and attended the prestigious Ardscoil Rís.” (Swords, 2010). It is not difficult, then to see why they might think their portrayal of the working-class as

grossly one-dimensional and a source of comedy is acceptable. *Horse Outside* is a modern day self-portrait imitating the portrayals of idiocy, incompetence and social ineptitude of the Irish as depicted by Sir John Tenniel for British magazine *Punch*. In the place of the British writers and cartoonists, today it is the Irish middle-class/creative class who tell a scathing working-class story, with all the same prejudice, inaccuracies and derision.



Figure 7: Sir John Tenniel, *Two Forces*, *Punch*, 29 Oct, 1881.

Conclusion

To conclude, it can be said that the *wise fool* stock character of today is the working-class, as a whole. Sometimes these wise fool characters advocate in the community to represent themselves or their society in groups or independently. The Beat poets took control of their experience and it began with language. Today, the poets of Ireland are expressing the same devotion to the Irish poetic revolution and using the voice across a broader spectrum. Their writing is activism and their song - protest.

The branding of the lower-classes has been upheld by the standards which exist in broader society. Much of this is due to the irresistibility and sheer convenience of the cliché, which has blinded many of the creative class to the poetry in detail. It appears cyclical - the mainstream feeds on classism and when society feeds on the media it becomes polluted with these biases. The effects can be witnessed in daily life; on the street, in schools, the institution and the professional world. It is transmitted through attitude and this phenomenon is what Bell Hooks calls 'psychic genocide.' (2000, p. 30). The dominant class strives to alienate the working-class from their own identity in the same way gentrification estranges them from their home and place.

The research has shown how the Irish mainstream entertainment maintains the status quo and fails to represent critically. Particularly in the case of stigma around drug addiction. Specific examples in the media, including video, lyrics and media engagement highlighted the damage this causes and the oppressive social mentality it warrants. The exploration of language and autonomy in the context of classist verbal appropriation argued that accent is not a flavour of the month or a luxury item in the same way that cultural identity is not malleable and social stratification is not a choice. However, assigning power is a choice. It is necessary when one stands in the position of power that discernment is used when allocating roles. The research has underlined a need for public work to become more conscientious, inclusive and to cease the demonisation and exploitation of one group. This is especially important regarding the Traveller Community.

"Repudiating exploitation by word and deed is a gesture of solidarity with the poor." (Hooks, 2000, p. 130). Hooks statement implies that since the poor do not have what is the norm for the middle-classes; college placements, opportunities, connections, inheritance,

property, stability. A reasonable proposal is to work in solidarity with the poor to help establish a right to their own identities and to ensure the portrayals of their lives are handled respectfully. To bring the hijacking and bastardisation of the lower-class story to a cease is to welcome them to script their own narratives, to develop their own characters and to deliver their own words, in their own voices. Let us consider the term ‘class consent.’ The revolution of language will be a mutual consideration.

This bid to enhance critical thinking and encourage permanent adjustments in attitude will require the rejection of offending matter, such as damaging stereotypes and the uninspiring typecast. Instead of victimisation of the working-class, their exaltation is paramount. Bell Hooks said: “Visionary thinkers and leaders who are poor must be at the forefront of a mass-based movement.” (Hooks, p. 130). Perhaps working-class people are best equipped to advocate. Some old clichés *do* serve well and will stand up against appropriation. “Actions speak louder than words.” Real change for an equal and just society must be achieved in word *and* deed.

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