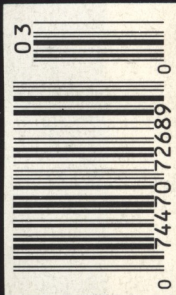


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As the old rivalry flares up, we ask the important questions: who's got the best football, trousers, music, clubs? Who invented acid house? A bigot's guide.

MORRISSEY: HAS HE LOST HIS GRIP?

THE EMINENT MANCUNIAN INTERVIEWED (EXCLUSIVELY) BY NICK KENT



MORRISSEY INTERVIEWED BY NICK KENT

PHOTOGRAPHY ANTON CORBIJN

THE d r a g p E N D

Everything is so neat and spartan in Morrissey's room that the presence of a highly decorative acoustic guitar propped against a chair instantly calls attention to itself. Do you play now, I ask. "A little," he answers, that great anvil of a face suddenly creased with the familiar expression of 'pained mirth'. Why don't you write your own tunes then? It'd save you a lot of grief . . . "Everyone keeps telling me that," he says evenly. "Let's just say I have an inner voice which keeps telling me . . . ahem . . . *stay as pure as you are.*"

He laughs then settles back. "I mean, my theory is, 'Why dabble with a masterpiece?' In a diluted sense, that's exactly how I feel about . . . um . . . things."

Four hours later, our interview at an end, one of those random seething energy rushes I've noticed he gets when he's excited will propel him helplessly to grab the instrument and cradle it meditatively in his lap for half a minute before, just as suddenly, he almost throws it from his grasp, a look of mock-horror spreading across his face. "Oh God, I must look like Johnny Marr!" he splutters. The joke is on him and we both get a laugh out of it. But Johnny Marr, or more particularly the subject of his absence, is otherwise no laughing matter for Morrissey.

It is then that Morrissey chooses to share the title of his next album with me. He doesn't say anything, just scrawls in bold block swathes of ink the words "BONA DRAG" onto a scrap of paper before lapsing into one of his more enigmatic smiles. Why . . . uh? "Well," he says mellifluously, "*Bona* is Latin for 'good' and *Drag* is . . . well, 'drag'!"

The time was an evening in mid-November, the setting for this encounter the magnificent country mansion/recording studio complex deep in the wooded bowels of Reading part-owned by Clive Langer – the owlish and soft-spoken producer best known for his work with Madness – whom Morrissey had contacted only five weeks before, following a final falling-out with his previous collaborator, Stephen Street (Langer had already produced one single for Morrissey, the numbingly bad "Ouija Board, Ouija Board" whose atrocious media reception had everyone a bit ashen-faced this evening).

While Morrissey's closest friend, the video director Tim Broad, ►

Walking backwards into the Nineties, has Morrissey finally lost all sane 'focus' on his career?

Acquaintances say he is lonely and desperately unhappy. "I find it hard to make friends, due probably to the fact that my view of the world is fairly off-beat"

hovered in the background, Langer pottered between the living quarters and the studio, where the six new songs he'd composed with Morrissey for the album were in different stages of completion.

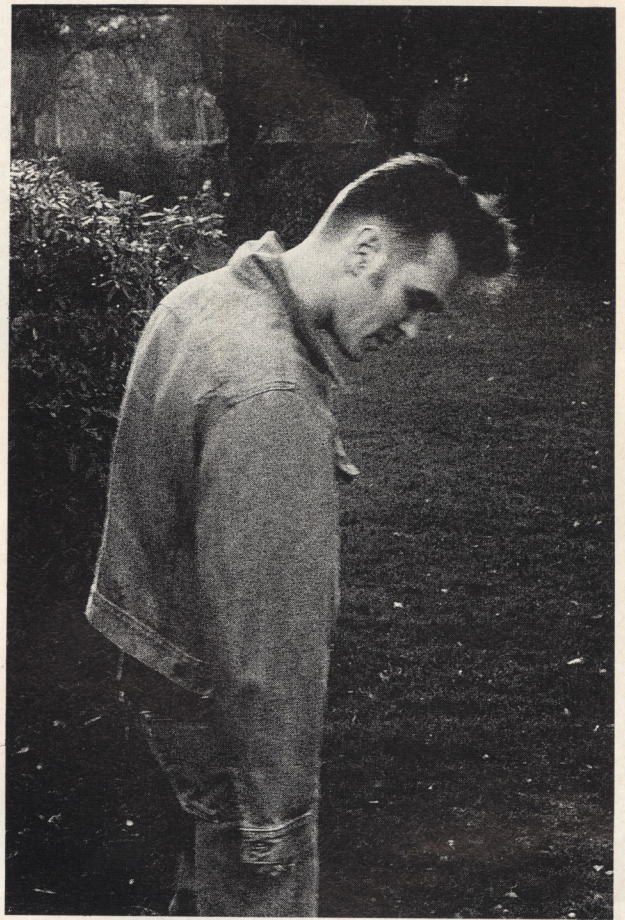
In due course, I was played rough mixes of three tracks: "November Spawned A Monster", a thunderous, highly extravagant piece of pop weirdness about a crippled girl which features a cameo of the Canadian singer Mary Margaret O'Hara seemingly undergoing exorcism; "Piccadilly Palare", an ode to male prostitution in Piccadilly endowed with brash tricky chord changes and a Beatlesque lustre; and "The Girl Least Likely To", a song about "that friend you have who really believes in the imminence of her success yet secretly you know it's never going to happen for her" which sounds the most trenchantly Smiths-like of the three. Langer's old mucker Elvis Costello (they wrote "Shipbuilding" together) last year referred to Morrissey post-Smiths as "someone who comes up with the best song titles in the world, only somewhere along the line he seems to forget to write the song", and there's certainly more than a grain of truth in that. At least in these new lyrics one could sense that he was trying to make amends, leaning forward, trying harder, finally writing 'substantially' again.

Three months have elapsed since then, however, and there is no "Bona Drag" or at least no sign of a Morrissey album of that title being available in the foreseeable future. Instead, the six Langer/Morrissey songs recorded in November are being released on two singles, one after the other, commencing in February with "November Spawned A Monster" and followed by "Piccadilly Palare". Both are worthy enough but balefully uncommercial, deserving more the context of an album for best exposure (the latter is over five minutes long, for example) and almost certain to be either ignored or banned as a result.

Has Morrissey finally lost all sane 'focus' on his career? Maybe a more pertinent question would be: does being profoundly alienated by life automatically involve profoundly alienating almost everyone, barring your mother and a brace of 'caring supportive friends', you come into anything resembling close contact with?

Anyway, though nothing is official, it looks as if Langer is about to join Stephen Street in Morrissey's out-tray. Street confided to the press over a year ago his opinion that Morrissey is still hopelessly obsessed by The Smiths, is still unable to convince himself he can top their standards of excellence, and is biding his time until Johnny Marr comes to his senses and returns to the fold. However Johnny Marr, after a disastrous couple of post-Smiths years, has recently started re-establishing his profile, recording and performing live with The The, and teaming up with Bernard Albrecht and Neil Tennant for the super-group Electronic. Marr has also started to tell his side of The Smiths' break-up to various publications, characterising his relationship with Morrissey for *Rolling Stone* magazine as "not exactly a laugh a minute", and going so far as to declare a Smiths reunion out of the question because "only a fool doesn't know when it's time to stop".

Meanwhile Morrissey – still proudly dressed in the 'widow's weeds' of his Smiths heritage, still alone and vacillating, still tormenting himself with that ever-recurring question, "Am I in too deep?" – is walking backwards into the Nineties...



Well, Mozz . . . (he looks pained). I'm sorry, you don't like being called 'Mozz'? "It makes me sound like a racehorse."

OK, Morrissey. Mutual acquaintances have told me recently, "We go and see Morrissey and, oh, it's terrible. He's so lonely and he won't come out, he's so desperately unhappy." Isn't that bullshit? Aren't you really happy being that way? "No, I'm not happy at all. Not ecstatically happy anyway."

Don't you feel hemmed in by all this ceaseless self-absorption? Shouldn't you draw a line between your art and your life? "But isn't that the burden of the genuine artist? If you feel intensely about life, and if you see everything with an artistic viewpoint, it's inevitable that it's going to dilute any sense of fun and spontaneity. Which is what my life is always robbed of. I always had a staircase logic. I always thought about it later, *then* knew what I should've done. But never at the time."

But this image of you as Mr Splendid Isolation . . . You have friends? You go out? "Yes, I have a few friends, a couple of very close friends, one of which is Tim (Broad). We go out quite a lot, we go to pubs, to *some* clubs and to bars. But they're not terribly successful evenings, generally. Just a matter of showing your face and going home – absolutely unrestrained hysterical fun . . . let's say it's not easy! (*laughs*) But then life isn't easy is it? Having said that, I do feel I've changed a great deal in the last seven or eight years."

Don't you feel you have to 'come out' in some way to face the Nineties? "Yes, and I want to. I find the notion of Morrissey as a continuing singing artist in the Nineties suddenly very, very interesting. Very challenging and exciting. Having hit 30 and got over that particular barrier, I feel better about my standpoint in the scheme of British pop music. And though I dread the Nineties, I believe my position in this coming decade is perhaps one of the most challenging and interesting things that's ever happened to British pop music."

Some say your 'moment' is passing. "The moment isn't passing, I don't believe that. Because I, more than anyone else, had a very clear

viewpoint of The Smiths' career and of my career. When people have said I was strong, I sometimes wasn't very strong. When I've done records that've had brilliant reviews, they weren't totally perfect. So really my view is the . . . real view, and it's the sharpest view. And I know it's becoming stronger and better, I really believe that. And when it comes time for me to do all the . . . stereotypical 'seizing the moment' things for me then I think it will be . . . pretty . . . interesting." (*laughs*)

How do you relate to "Viva Hate" now? "I feel it was more of an event than an achievement. I think the audience was simply relieved that I was still going on with living. That in itself was the celebration of 'Viva Hate'! I've always been fiercely self-critical and . . . it wasn't perfect. And it *wasn't* better than 'Strangeways Here We Come'! There's at least six tracks on it that I'd now willingly bury in the nearest patch of soil. And place a large stone on top." (*laughs*)

Could you talk about your relationship with Stephen Street? "Do I have to?"

Well, surely he helped you out . . . (*waspishly*) "Well, I wasn't hanging off the edge of a cliff! I wasn't laying in a hospital bed with tubes sprouting out of me! I wasn't entirely incapable, no matter what he might say."

Johnny Marr recently said how The Smiths came to a point where one had to choose between Herman's Hermits and Sly Stone, and that's when problems occurred. Has that quote got anything to do with why you recorded Herman's Hermits' "East West" as a B-side of your last single? "No, not at all. I never read that quote . . . Um it's true The Smiths were tied to certain, possibly restrictive influences . . ."

It's often intimated you have a 'problem' with black music? "I still don't really know what black music is. I mean, I never had a problem with the Marvelettes. Or Dionne Warwick. I listened to their records all the time and still do. So . . ."

For "Bengali In Platforms" you got called a 'racist'. "But I'm always called something. I didn't mind that."

Talking of racism, how do you relate to the sudden rise of Guns'N'Roses? "I find it frightening, but not for challenging reasons. It's frightening because it symbolizes the state of music in America. If you look at the top ten albums of the moment you'll find the Rolling Stones, Bob Dylan, Neil Young, Eric Clapton, Grateful Dead and I find that horrifying. There's a song on this album that has the Rolling Stones in mind because I've been so disgusted by their most recent comeback that I no longer find it sad or pitiful, I just feel immense anger that they don't just *get out of the way*. You open papers in this country, and every day there's the obligatory picture of, y'know, Mick-with-bags-at-the-airport, or Keith saying he's completely normal now. They just won't *move away!* The song is called 'Get Off The Stage.'"

Tell me about the other new songs. "There's a song called 'Striptease With A Difference' which is about playing a game of cards wherein the loser of each game has to take off an item of clothing. And it's about secretly hoping one loses and in fact manipulating the game towards that end. Then there's 'November' (Spawned A Monster) which in a sense is my version of the New York Dolls's 'Frankenstein'. It's about a person who's confined to a wheelchair, who can't make much sense of her life and whose only ambition is to walk down the road in clothes she personally went out and chose and bought herself. And that is as far as her ambitions can stretch."

That's Mary Margaret O'Hara doing the middle section . . . "The scatty bits? Yes. I was massively intrigued by her album. I thought it so beautiful I suddenly realised I hadn't in a decade heard someone singing because of deep-set personal neurosis, absolute need and desperation. You'd think she might fall apart at any second and become a pile of rags and bones on stage. For the first time in almost a decade I was 'high' – mentally really, really high. What kept coming back to me was 'Horses'. Mary Margaret also sings on another track, 'He Knows I'd Love To See Him', as well as Suggs, ex of Madness (*eyes me pensively*). Um . . . Did you approve of Madness? Didn't you feel that North London/Kinks connection?"

You played me "Piccadilly Palare" . . . "Palare' is gypsy slang that was adopted by the theatre and in the Seventies I heard it being used by male prostitutes (*laughs*). They have their own code words for sizing people up and talking among themselves. The song is about male prostitution in Piccadilly. It became a very big thing during the Seventies. Were you ever aware of documentaries like *Johnny Go Home*? In the North, among most people I know, there was something oddly romantic about the whole thing. It spelt 'freedom'. Catching a coach and spending a day in Picadilly was extraordinary. It's very glitzy now because Soho's been cleaned up, but *then* it was quite . . . powerful."

You write a lot about the homosexual experience . . . "Well . . . not a lot."

OK, you write a lot about homosexual 'longing'. "I've always said I leave things very open and that I sing about people. Without limitation. And I don't think that automatically makes me a homosexual."

You've always taken offence at that word . . . "Because it's . . . limiting and restrictive."

Do you feel more able to sexually project yourself now? "Oh yes I do. Throughout The Smiths' career I was entirely crippled. I was bound to a wheel chair, I have no doubt about that. And then suddenly one day I woke up and it was gone and I felt, 'My God!' It was quite recently, just over a year ago. I mean, I suppose 'manhood' comes to everybody eventually (*bursts out laughing*). Maybe I flatter myself."

What about sexual . . . relationships? "I don't have relationships at all. It's out of the question."

Why? "Partly because I was always attracted to men or women who were never attracted to me. And I was never attracted to women or men who *were* attracted to me. So that's the problem. I've never met the right person."

In my favourite of your confessional songs – "Half A Person" – you sing about being hopelessly smitten with a girl who, after you return to impress her as a famous personage, simply tells you, "When you were hopelessly poor I just liked you more" . . . Is that autobiographical? "Yes, that is all absolutely true. She does exist."

But don't you ever feel like taking, y'know, one mad plunge? "I'd like to, yeah, but not just with anybody. It . . . uh . . . just doesn't come naturally to me."

You seem to have problems with other people? "I do find it very hard to make friends, due probably to the fact that my view of the world is fairly off-beat."

Would you call yourself paranoid? "I don't really *feel* paranoid, but severely normal people make me paranoid yes. Because they can exercise such

The Stone Roses seem to have made great inroads into The Smiths audience? – "They are doing very well because they are very organised. We were never very organised. But they don't move me at all, and I wish they did. I really wish I could feel enthusiastic about them"

power. It's hard to go out, because even if people don't like you or don't want to talk to you, they're still looking at you with unabashed curiosity. To have someone constantly staring is a great burden. I'm not an incredibly glamorous person to look at. I don't breeze into apartment stores, or swoon into nightclubs with an entourage."

What do these people expect of you? "When people stop me, they expect me to be very, very poetic. They begin to talk to me about the very poetic things, their vision of the world."

Do they want to read you their poetry? "Yes, all the time."

Isn't that embarrassing? "Yes, but only because a lot of it is very personal."

An unspecified number of young people were reported to have killed themselves after The Smiths split up. How disturbed did that make you feel? "I felt disturbed, yes, but then I had to sit down and really believe that whatever triggered off the unhappiness in these individuals had occurred before they'd encountered The Smiths. I have to believe that."

As much as you're idolized, you're also hated, often just as intensely, and often by other prominent acts... "There is an extreme intolerance. For a lot of people, it's because they're jealous of me – a lot of other artists are very, very jealous of me. Because although I'm not tolerated in any way by the big, fat media, other artists are actually jealous of *that!* It's so hard at the end of the Eighties to be even faintly rebellious, or faintly dangerous. If artists want to be rebellious or dangerous they just slap on the leather jacket and do the 'rock'n'roll' things which are no longer rebellious. But it's truly tricky and quite a feat to hit the nerve with pop music. And unwittingly I always do it. Every time. Nothing has changed in that respect."

Weren't The Smiths a 'rock band'? "The Smiths were always a pop group. Part of the general policy was never to use the word 'band'."

Didn't the other three see it as a 'rock' endeavour though? "I don't believe so. In *truly* frustrating moments Johnny would always say, 'For heaven's sake! It's only a pop group.' That would always bring the tension of the argument right down. Of course the next day it would be completely forgotten and we'd be back to creasing our brows."

If Johnny phoned and asked to work with you again, what would you say? "It's no secret that I would be on the next bus to his house. I don't feel, by saying that, I have no confidence in my present standing as a solo artist... But he wrote great music and the union was absolutely perfect."

Johnny claims now he felt your creative chemistry was drying up on "Strangeways"... How do you recall that album? "It was a very happy time amongst the four members of the group. Surrounding us were obviously the gnashing wolves..."

But was it creatively drying up? "Not at all. The very last Smiths' sessions at Streatham we recorded two songs that turned up as B-sides: 'Work Is A Four Letter Word' (a cover of a Cilla Black song), and one called 'I Keep Mine Hidden' which was the last song Johnny and I wrote together and the last song The Smiths recorded together. Now when I play The Smiths – which I do a lot – that song is always the first I play. And it's the one that makes me feel the happiest."

Were you really shocked when Johnny quit? "I was very, very shocked. Very, very, very shocked. I couldn't believe it."

Did he give you no signs? "Not directly, no. We did talk about it at one stage at his flat in Chelsea one night. We were so tired and exhausted, but it was a very... together... unified chat."

But in interviews he keeps stressing how ill and unhappy he was... "We were both unhappy about many things, mainly the general setup of The Smiths. Plus the fact that we were working so hard but nothing could ever be utilized in a positive way. That was so draining. And we'd gone through a succession of potential managers, none of whom were right and all of whom were so emotionally damaging, because even trying to get away from people became really hard. We were just excessively vulnerable. On the final American tour there were periods when Johnny looked so ill that it was just a matter of saying to one another, 'This isn't right, this is not the right way to live'."

At Wolverhampton last year you played a couple of Smiths songs for the first time without Johnny. "That concert at Wolverhampton was me saying goodbye. I felt that just because The Smiths had ended... those songs really were me also. I didn't feel like walking away saying, 'Oh no, no more of that. Let's move on and be massively creative.' I still feel that all of those songs are me, I had the right to play them."

How do you feel about The Smiths and Rough Trade now? "It was pathetic. The subject of flyposting wasn't broached 'till The Smiths' ninth single. Nothing was utilized and Rough Trade are largely to blame. But The Smiths not having management was also a problem. Nothing surrounding the Smiths was ever positively *exploited* – it seems such an ugly word but sometimes it can be handy." (laughs)

Were The Smiths a democracy? "No, not a democracy. I never found a potential manager who could deal with the whole situation without wanting creative input, without giving their opinions. We just wanted to be helped along with our own ideas. And managers are never capable of doing that. They can't resist meddling, believing they too are making the new album, designing the cover. You must understand that The Smiths was an absolutely closed society. It really, really was."

Were The Smiths in a sense your gang? "Totally, yes. Because people were always quite frightened of us. When we'd walk into a room, people would suddenly become very nervous of this... um... 'combined body of Mancunians'. If people sense that you don't really care about their opinions, then yes they do become frightened."

But you don't need a gang in your 30s? "No, I feel that I'm a very strong person. I only realised from breaking from The Smiths that I had my own personal sense of power very much together. That's the big benefit."

How much do you crave that kind of partnership again? "It's not a matter of 'slyly craving', it just couldn't be any other way. It's better to have that close working relationship with someone who writes music, because then you could make a few mistakes amongst yourselves and the outside world would be none the wiser. Now, because I work with other people, it's less easy to be 'random' about the things I do. I write all the time but obviously now, post-Smiths, it's whenever I can get hold of a tune that really starts me humming. But that *exuberant* music is few and far between now."

Johnny Marr seems to feel The Smiths were overrated. Do you think they were ruined by the expectations of the critics, me included? "No. To me, The Smiths have always been and continue to be terribly underrated. That's all I can say. That's the essence of my personal frustration."

Hasn't Manchester become something of a prison for you now? – "Yes I do feel that. Sometimes. I do try to escape it, but it never leaves you. Mileage doesn't help"



KEVIN CUMMINS

"That concert at Wolverhampton was me saying goodbye"

Don't you feel like Yoko Ono, though, protecting the Smiths' legacy, beavering around fighting litigations, seeing lawyers all the time. "It can seem that way most of the time, yes, but in matters of money people get very strange. They step out of themselves, go a bit mental."

What about Craig Gannon? He only played with The Smiths for a few months anyway. "Craig . . . it's . . . I'm not sure if I can talk about it. It's very, very serious. I'd rather not. What it boils down to, though, is people having too much time on their hands. Do you understand? People who came into contact with The Smiths came into a situation where a lot of money was floating around. Then suddenly they're out of that situation. They rethink."

Aren't these 'Smiths reunion' rumours every few months a terrible albatross round your neck? "I get infuriated by the rumours that surround me and The Smiths. For instance the *NME* had a huge story about me joining 808 State and they wanted to do an interview with me about dance music! As if my attitude to dance music had changed! I'm not interested in dance music whatsoever!"

Do you feel any affiliation with Happy Mondays and Stone Roses? Would you have liked to do *Top Of The Pops* with them? "I don't know them personally. I'm quite happy for them. I'm always interested in Manchester groups so a Mancunian *Top Of The Pops* would have been very interesting, yes (*pauses*). But fate decrees . . ."

Hasn't Manchester become something of a prison for you now? "Yes I do feel that. Sometimes. I do try to escape it, but it never leaves you. Mileage doesn't help."

The Stone Roses seem to have made great inroads into The Smiths' audience. "I think they are doing very well because they are very organised. The Smiths were never very organised. But they don't move me at all, and I really wish they did. I really wish I could feel enthusiastic about them."

What about Happy Mondays? "I quite like their first LP."

They love to publicise their debauchery, unlike The Smiths . . . "It's the duty of each generation to flatten the morals of the previous one. And The Smiths, I suppose, are now the previous generation. There's too much bitterness for me here. No one played The Smiths on daytime radio. Ever. That's why for this new generation of groups, things are so much easier – because The Smiths ploughed through that thoroughfare."

Both groups are very respectful to you. Both have told me they feel more kinship with The Smiths than with New Order. "It surprises me to hear you say that."

What do you feel about New Order? "I never, ever understood New Order. I don't feel hate, anger, jealousy or anything *strong* for them. But that's the problem! They just passed over my head. Or under it."

What about Joy Division, then? "I saw them just before 'the death' and I was astonishingly unmoved. As were the audience, I might add. To me, it's all just . . . legend."

Do you feel any kinship with the Pet Shop Boys? "I feel absolutely no kinship whatsoever with the Pet Shop Boys. Not this year or the next! They don't leave any impression on me whatsoever."

No interest at all? You've socialised with Neil Tennant . . . "Well, Neil interests me, yes, in the sense that I find a brain like that working successfully in this medium far more interesting than, well, fill in your own blank, really. At least he's an intelligent person."

What about this Ecstasy Culture in England? This new abandon in young audiences? "Well, obviously, as those audiences discover music for the first time, they're not going to be coming to it with very high standards. But they don't have concern for the past – for the late Sixties or early Seventies – so they're not very judgmental. It doesn't worry me though. I don't take drugs, I never did. I mean, I know people for

whom drugs make them very happy. And I personally know of many relationships that are built simply upon Ecstasy. On the surface it may seem like a good thing but one day it may all wear off. And physically, a lot of people will be in terrible, terrible trouble. The way I see it is people just breaking out and saying, 'No more depression, no more repression. I'm not going to stay on the dole queue. I'm going to go out and dance and meet people.' It's very much a seizing the opportunity, doing it now, forgetting the future."

The Smiths have been represented, wrongly I've always felt, as very much a box-bedroom culture . . . "It became less and less true as the years went by. I see Smiths fans as just basically intelligent people, nothing more or less."

Don't you feel that England is a doomed country now? "Yes I do, and so does everybody else. Even people who are quite level-headed and quite capable of happiness feel that this country is absolutely shambolically doomed. I feel I have to stay, though. I feel I have to go down with the ship if that's what must happen. Anything else would be too much like desertion. In this country, change is just so hard. And I don't see why it should be."

This 'Englishness' you wrap yourself in . . . "Yes I do."

Don't you ever feel like leaving all your books, records and old films – all your reference points to bygone cultures – and stepping out to embrace something new? "No, I've never wanted to do that. Why should I?"

So is the height of happiness, for you, still the idea of watching a good film on afternoon TV? "Yes it is, it certainly is."

In "Paint A Vulgar Picture" you sang, "In my bedroom in those ugly new homes/I dance my legs down to the knees". Do you still dance alone in your bedroom a lot? "Yes I do. It's a daily occurrence because I listen to music all the time. I become so purely transported sometimes it's like that thing where you're supposed to leave your body. And although you don't see yourself, that really does happen."

What about live performances in 1990? "Yes, I want to do live concerts. I'm pleased I've been reasonably silent and paused a great deal. I needed to do that."

You talk about events all the time. Wolverhampton was obviously an 'event'. Would doing a whole tour lessen that? "I don't think so. You see, I can stand at the edge at the moment and say, 'Let sleeping dogs lay'. The memories of the last Smiths tour were so beautiful that maybe I should just . . ."

At those Smiths concerts, you often seemed so horribly unwell. "I don't remember any of those nights to be honest with you (*laughs*). Every memory to me is that I was simply a catherine wheel, that was as far as it went. I can remember a few times when I was literally pushed onto the stage. I was pale, I was ill, I needed a meal, I needed a lie-in – all those natural circumstances you desire when you're being pawed about. But for me, those evenings were so emotional. It wasn't just a matter of going out and singing a smattering of songs with great choruses and clever endings."

In England you seem able to control your fame. Outside, of course, it's another matter. Isn't this the reason you're not much bigger abroad, particularly in America? "In a sense, yes. I've always held back and retained privacy. I prefer to stay calm. I've never allowed myself to be trampled underfoot by my own career. The Smiths didn't rush to America. We hesitated and it really helped us."

Did you see that readers of Spin magazine in America voted "Queen Is Dead" their all-time great album? "I find that totally astonishing! But once again it's a situation that cannot be usefully capitalized upon. That was the story of The Smiths' career. There's never been Smiths or Morrissey merchandizing available. Even in America, after two astonishing Smiths tours, you could never buy the records. The concerts we played were all 15,000 seaters, people going hysterical, you couldn't hear the music over the screams. Yet it was so abstract, because I never

expected that. The way I feel about America now is if I had a strong body of people and went to America, I would be an absolutely suffocatingly enormous figure. I know that would happen. But until I find that body of people I'm not going to do it."

But are you actually looking for this 'body of people'? (*cautiously*) "Yes . . . yes I am looking. But with one eye. Because I half also believe that they will just present themselves, if they're meant to be there. And if they're not meant to be there, then I'm being spared something."

You believe in divine intervention? "Somewhere, yes."

There's a quote about fame in a play by one of your favourite writers, Heathcote Williams, that it's God's way of punishing people, of marking them out. Can you relate to that? "I just think that human life is considered so insignificant now that the only thing one can do, in order to do anything at all, is 'to become famous'. This current obsession with 'fame' runs rife through all the people I know. They have to do it or else their life is absolutely, shambolically useless. And I don't believe that was always the case. I believe that pressures have driven people to this monstrous over-emphasis on fame, on 'doing' and 'being seen'. Not even 'doing' now. You just have to be 'seen' doing something and you're famous. That's strangulating."

Don't you feel perhaps that it's time to move into another field of creative endeavour, like a novel or a screenplay? "It could very easily, but I just don't want to do it. And I think there's time. My position in British pop, for better or worse, is unique and I'm not walking away from it. I don't want to. I'm going to stay around and make more records. That's what excites me. There's time to do other things (*pauses*) . . . if I want to do them. I wouldn't do them just because they're the 'next great adult step' and because it's a more dignified way of moving around. Which it definitely is . . . but . . . I'm not . . . I'm not ready . . . I'm not ready to go home yet" ●

