

## Chapter 6

### The Pilgrimage to Jim Morrison's Grave at Père Lachaise Cemetery: The Social Construction of Sacred Space

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The paradox could hardly have been greater: Jim Morrison (1943-1971), the American rock star and poet who refused to be constrained or pushed around by anyone, has been thrust into a straightjacket more than thirty years after his death. The *espace Morrison*, the area around his grave at the Parisian cemetery of Père Lachaise, had gradually evolved into a kind of sanctuary where his fans brought him to life again, as it were, and where his musicality, his lifestyle, and his poetic and philosophical legacy were evoked and propagated. But on April 15, 2004, the authorities unconditionally put a stop to these informal, communal gatherings that annexed the grave and its immediate environs. The erection of a closed iron ring of anchored barriers marked the culmination of almost thirty years of confrontation between Morrison fans and the established order. By their actions, the authorities have somehow managed to invert the meanings and functions of his grave, confronting some visitors with a curious paradox. Dorothea, a single woman from Hamburg who was born in 1966, was painfully struck by this during her visit on July 3, 2004.<sup>1</sup> 'It hurt me most for Jim Morrison himself,' she said. 'For him, barriers were the worst thing there was. The things that Jim had always wanted to guard against have become reality thirty years after his death. They've finally managed to lock him up.'<sup>2</sup>

In this contribution I will analyze the way in which Jim Morrison fans transform his grave into a sacred place and how the cult surrounding this idol has acquired performative shape in the public space. At the same time I will seek to establish whether there are forms of religiosity involved in the fan culture and Morrison cult on and around his grave and whether it is possible to speak of a Morrison 'pilgrimage.'

## Mythologizing

Notwithstanding his international fame, Morrison was buried almost anonymously five days after his death in Paris on July 3, 1971.<sup>3</sup> In part to prevent hysterical scenes involving fans, an austere ceremony was decided on. Morrison was interred without fanfare – no rituals, poems, or prayers – in less than ten minutes and in the cheapest available coffin. The grave was little more than a nondescript, rectangular patch of sand, known as a *pleine-terre*, demarcated by bluestone blocks and with a plaque for the purposes of identification.<sup>4</sup> The plaque was replaced in 1972 by a simple headstone, which was later replaced by a larger stone bearing an inscription.

It was not until the late 1970s, however, that interest in Morrison received a new impetus, a revival that occurred more or less in parallel with the rediscovery of 'his' band, the Doors. This was prompted by the posthumous release of a special LP containing nothing but recordings of Morrison reading his own poems, accompanied by music adapted by the three surviving band members. It also marked the beginning of a mythologizing process around the band and its front man, with Morrison increasingly being profiled as a writer. Added to that, 1979 saw the release of Francis Coppola's anti-war film *Apocalypse Now*, in which the mysterious, dramatic Doors' song 'The End' featured prominently. *No one here gets out alive* appeared one year later. This successful – and controversial – Morrison biography presented for the first time in print various speculations about the final year of Morrison's life in Paris and about how he met his end. Informal confirmation of this process and of the growing iconization of Morrison as a male sex symbol, dark-star musician and *poète maudit* came with the September 1981 edition of *Rolling Stone*, the pop music magazine with an international audience. A photo of Morrison was emblazoned on the cover, together with the words: 'He is Hot, He is Sexy, and He is Dead' (Fowlie 1994). While Morrison and the Doors were subject to a worldwide re-evaluation among older and successive younger generations, his friends, acquaintances and 'hangers-on' began publishing a string of insiders' books, all of which continued to create, maintain, unmask, or embellish new myths. Above all, it was the fact that Morrison's body had only been seen by his girlfriend and a Parisian doctor before being interred in a sealed coffin

that triggered considerable speculation that Morrison 'lived on' (Fowlie 1994: 94-96; Seymore 1991). This idea was given further credence by the fact that his 'official' biographers believed he was perfectly capable of such an 'escape' (Hopkins and Sugerman 1980: 373). Finally, the emergence of a new literary genre of Morrison fantasy biographies and novels, like those by Strete (1982), Farren (1999), Verheul (1999)<sup>5</sup>, Pierce (2003) and Meunié (2005), in which he continues to experience bizarre adventures on earth or in the afterlife, has only lent more weight to the idea that he is not dead, that he lives on or has been reincarnated, and that he has a supernatural status.<sup>6</sup>

This denial of death, the belief in the existence of a life after death, or the attribution of an eternal life has many parallels in world religions and could point to the presence of religious perceptions in relation to Morrison. Just as the day of a saint's death marks the birth of his heavenly life and the beginning of an intermediary function, so too do some Jim Morrison devotees believe that they can still communicate in some way with him and/or his spirit. Different stories – from fantasy novels and accounts from witnesses or visitors to Morrison's grave about Morrison continuing to live and experience things – have influenced and complemented one another.

Oliver Stone's successful 1991 film *The Doors* gave a whole new impetus to this mythologizing. The film was essentially a disguised biography of Morrison, based on Stone's own understanding of the central character. The film partly confirmed the existing image but added new, powerful iconographies and narratives. Stone's personal feelings and viewpoint were highly influential because he himself was a devoted fan who claimed that the Doors had completely turned his life around when he was young. For him, Jim Morrison symbolized the central preoccupations of the 1960s, particularly the search for new forms of heightened consciousness and freedom. Thanks to his physical resemblance to Morrison and his superb acting ability, actor Val Kilmer managed to more or less convey Morrison's reputed charisma in the film. The result was an international success that shaped Morrison's image, and to a lesser extent that of the Doors, for new generations of fans.

For our purposes, it is important to point out how the film uses manipulation to highlight Morrison's supposed shamanistic abilities. The film opens sig-

nificantly with a mystical representation, set to music, of how Morrison took on these qualities as a small child by means of 'spiritual transmission' from a dying Native American in the New Mexico desert. With references made in passing to the secularization – the 'loss of God' – of American society, the film continues with the words 'the ceremony is now to begin' and jumps ahead in time to the adult Morrison. His interest in the occult and his shamanistic trances and performances during concerts are shown at length. There is no doubt that these filmic narratives have exerted a powerful influence on his fans' perception of Morrison as someone with supernatural or transcendental qualities.

The media's continued inflation of Morrison in relation to the Doors met with a worldwide response, leading to a broad iconization of the Morrison phenomenon. An early Morrison photo, a 1967 portrait from Joel Brodsky's *Young Lion* series showing a bare torso and a head of abundant curly hair, became the canonized image of the idol par excellence (cf. Ortíz 1998: 63-64).<sup>7</sup> Distributed internationally, this series has had such a powerful impact over



*Postcard of a Morrison picture from Joel Brodsky's Young Lion series of 1967, with signature. Collection Meertens Institute.*

the years that it has helped shape the way in which Morrison is perceived. In discussion forums on the Internet, it has triggered observations like: 'He looks so primal, ferrel [sic] -- like a wild cat (...) also the look in his eyes is so confrontational. (...) If man was made in the image of G(g?)od [sic], then this is the mirror' and 'Great photos, ... talk about looking like a god.'<sup>8</sup> Not only did fans see him as someone divine, for many fans these photos functioned as images of the human ideal: for women, the man of their dreams and for men, the ideal masculine model. This is expressed in the frequent attempts by in-group fans to imitate and copy Morrison's lifestyle and outward appearance.

### Fan Scene vs Heritage

The growing iconization also had an impact on Morrison's grave. The opportunity to de-anonymize his minimalist grave came in 1981, ten years after his death. Fans wanted some link with and attribution to their idol, as well as acknowledgement and recognition that this was indeed his final resting place. A larger headstone with his name was erected. Someone made a bust of Morrison (which was later stolen) and placed it on the headstone so that fans could picture him. In 1991, twenty years after his death, Morrison's parents arranged for a larger, more formal headstone with a bronze plaque.<sup>9</sup>

The grave underwent not only material changes. Because of the fan culture (the 'scene'), the immaterial changes were much more far-reaching. In the 1980s and 1990s, the growing presence of the fan scene had given rise to the *espace Morrison* – the physical, central reference point for fans and devotees from all around the world. This had evolved into a socio-cultural space where the identification with and the *imitatio* of the life of Morrison took shape. It was an informal annexation of the surrounding gravestones and crypts where fans drank excessively, smoked, took drugs, removed their clothes, had public sex, slept, and put into practice the non-conformist ideas and lifestyle championed by Morrison. But they also recited his poems or lyrics, played recordings of his music or played the music themselves. The headstone usually functioned as a table, or 'shrine' as it was increasingly referred to, where they revered and paid homage to Morrison. The shrine continued to be the central



*Postcard showing the grave of Jim Morrison adorned with a bust and graffiti, approx. 1987. Collection Meertens Institute.*

focus for visitors and the focal point of an ever-growing social and sacred space, at the same time underscoring the importance of *locality* in this context (Bennett 2000: 195-198). The literal appropriation of the space by gatherings of Morrison fans was so informal, chaotic and ‘anarchistic’ in nature – fully in keeping with the idol worshipped there – that the site became increasingly contested. This had already led to a temporary closure in 1988-1989 that failed to relocate or eliminate the cult; it would be effortlessly revived again later (Söderholm 1990: 303). Thus, the site continued to exert its power, becoming once again the subject of conflict and eventually being permanently and physically cordoned-off from the public.



*Grave of Morrison with gifts from visitors, 8 December 2003.*

*Photo: M. Campbell.*

The fans were active not only during the day; in the evenings and at night-time they would creep into the closed cemetery to gather at the grave. In 1991, to put an end to these gatherings and to the 'profaning' of the cemetery, solid, spiked railings were erected on top of the cemetery's outer walls, a measure that sparked off fierce clashes with fans on the anniversary of his death later that year. After that, there were daily checks to ensure that fans did in fact leave the cemetery before closing time and were not locked in. This failed to prevent disturbances of the peace during the day, however. New confrontations were not long in coming, especially as the entire area around the grave was severely



*An analogy of the church altar: fanscene has covered the new gravestone for Jim Morrison with drugs and alcohol, 1990. Photo: M. Campbell.*

marked and damaged by graffiti and inscriptions in the thousands. This was the permanent confrontation of the informal Morrison cult with the order and sacrality of the cemetery. Also at that time, in response to the newly launched heritage policy and to burgeoning tourism, the cemetery was declared a historic monument, which meant that Père Lachaise – although still a functioning cemetery – became subject to a process of museumization. This served to heighten tensions with the Morrison scene, who were held partly responsible for stripping the cemetery of almost all of Morrison's funerary paraphernalia.

However, the introduction of tighter security measures did not altogether halt the alienation of objects. Visitors still tried to remove sand from the area around the grave, to take objects from the vicinity or to leave behind etched

proof of their visit. For that matter, treating the dead with respect and the meaning of 'property' are relative concepts for the fans. Because of the sacred significance of objects that have come into contact with the grave and the site as whole, objects or letters placed there by fans often hold an irresistible attraction. Personal gifts – like poems, drawings, photos, flags and packets of marijuana (cf. Thomas 2006: 17-22) – tend to disappear very quickly. The number of gifts has fallen since barriers were erected in 2004, but anything left behind is still usually removed.<sup>10</sup> And when the Père Lachaise security guards are absent, there are always fans who will jump over the barriers to appropriate something.

Hence the decision by the cemetery management to cordon off the grave.<sup>11</sup> The primary reason was the damage to Père Lachaise – described as '*la plus spectaculaire profanation permanente de sépultures*' – as a cultural monument and as part of cultural heritage (De Langlade 1982/2002: 71). In 2004, the cemetery's historian inadvertently attracted worldwide notoriety after stating in a *Guardian* interview about Morrison: 'We'd like to kick him out, because we don't want him; he causes too many problems. If we could get rid of him, we'd do it straight away' (Henley 2004). This view, held by certain Parisians but never before articulated so brusquely, came to the attention of the world press. It shocked not only Morrison's followers but also the Paris authorities, who hastened to explain that the American rock star's grave was part of *French* cultural heritage and there would be no question of relocation. This announcement was quite unrelated to the fact that, like most graves at Père Lachaise, Morrison's grave was given in perpetuity to the family and for that reason could not possibly be relocated.

Nevertheless, the grave has remained Morrison's *lieu de mémoire* par excellence. Despite all of the problems, his final resting place has continued to work its way up the ranks at Père Lachaise. Today, it is the cemetery's most visited grave, and together with the Eiffel Tower, Notre Dame and the Louvre, it is one of the top tourist attractions in the French capital.<sup>12</sup> It was not only Morrison's grave that became a focal point; owing to the growing importance of the Morrison cult, any place that recalls his stay in Paris has acquired a significant, albeit subsidiary, role within the Morrison memorial tour. Fans can

take a route past all the sites that are somehow connected with Morrison's life in Paris in 1971, such as the Hotel George V, the apartment on the Rue Beautreillis 17, the Le Beautreillis restaurant in the same street, Café de Flore, and the L'Astroquet and La Palette bars.<sup>13</sup>

At Père Lachaise, 'hidden away' in an unsightly corner, Morrison fans will still find a simple grave that fails to correspond to prevailing esthetic norms or to what is usually deemed worthy of tourist attention. This monument occupies quite a different position from an attraction like Graceland, the grave and home of Elvis Presley, which in terms of design, management, and merchandising is entirely controlled and administered by Elvis Presley Enterprises and which has long since assumed Disney World proportions (Doss 1999). In comparison, Morrison's grave seems above all to emanate humility, simplicity and modesty, as if it were the material representation of a Catholic saint's classic virtues. How then should we classify Morrison?

### Idol, Icon or Saint?

In his book *Heiligen, idolen, iconen* (1988), the Dutch historian Willem Frijhoff published a programmatic manifesto about the relationship, past and present, between conceptual terms like saint, idol and icon. Combining a cultural-historical perspective and an anthropologizing approach, he brought together his insights on the broad theme of personal sacrality. In so doing, he gave new direction to research evaluating the deeds, virtues and vices of the social elite, and he broadened the concept of sainthood in analytical terms. In this regard, Frijhoff stated that social groups could also ascribe sainthood to exemplary, non-church-related lives – including idols or icons – that are orientated to other than strictly material and individual values (Frijhoff 1988: 19-20; 39-51; 52-78).<sup>14</sup> They can then perform specific functions, including in the sphere of spirituality and religiosity. The Morrison case is an example that ties in well with this model.<sup>15</sup>

This broadened analysis also permits us to establish the degree to which religiosity has a place within popular and pop music culture. The German sociologist Thomas Luckmann was the first to carry out systematic research



*An Italian admirer of Morrison asks for his support, also on behalf of his friends who have signed a card that bears a message, 3 July 2004.*

*Photo: P.J. Margry.*

into hidden and implicit forms of religiosity (Luckmann 1967: 115-117). In the early 1960s, he identified the rapidly growing discrepancy between the subjective autonomy of the individual and the objective autonomy of the primary (religious) institutions in the public domain. At that time, the traditional religious domain in Western societies was beginning to fragment, in connection with processes of secularization and, interacting with this, de-secularization or sacralization (Berger 2002). Increasingly, individuals withdrew into the private sphere and attached greater importance to their subjective autonomy, thereby giving rise to new forms of religiosity. Cultural globalization and fragmentation, new religious movements and individual appropriation practices involving customs, rituals and symbols began to accommodate non-institutionalized forms of religion that are manifested, individually or in groups, as social constructs.

Although as a rule there is only a small religious element in the fan cult surrounding Morrison, we do in practice see constantly recurring connections

(assemblages) with Christian culture, rituality and religion, forms that have been introduced by his fans. For example, we regularly find photos placed on the grave depicting Morrison's head and a crown of thorns, an image of the dead musical messiah. When he was alive, Morrison himself encouraged a blending with existing religious traditions. First of all, there was his constant identification with the shaman. However, for a time he also wore a golden crucifix around his neck, saying, 'I like the symbol visually, and it may confuse people' (Fowle 1993: 82). This symbol and Morrison's explanation may be what prompted visitors to place crosses and crucifixes with Morrison's name on the grave. But he also turned against the Christian church in his texts, saying, 'let's reinvent the Gods.' These ideas are expressed most clearly in his fondness for Native American spirituality and shamanism. At that time some reviewers were already describing the Doors' concerts as performances in the tradition of shamanistic evocations. In their view, Morrison created heightened powers of observation, using them – as he once said in relation to himself – to 'mediate between man and spirit world' (Morrison 1970: 71). Even band member Manzarek attested to this: 'I've never seen a performer like Jim – it was as if it wasn't Jim performing but a shaman.' In his film about the Doors, Stone left nothing to the imagination, on several occasions using filmic dissolves to transform his idol into a shaman. We see Morrison being initiated into the metaphysical world of Native Americans and shamans. Stone suggests that Morrison constantly had visions or supernatural experiences throughout his life and during his performances; in the film, Morrison's hallucinations and those of the shaman flow into one another. However much the 'divine' image of Morrison as a shaman and Dionysian incarnation may have been promoted by Morrison himself and by those close to him (Riordan and Prochnicky 1991: 183-200; cf. Seay and Neely 1986: 229-237), there can be no doubt that the film's textual and visual narratives have exerted a powerful influence in this respect. The perception of Morrison as having supernatural, transcendental and healing powers acquired ever-greater importance within the fan culture (cf. Fournier and Jiménez 2005).

The element of the intermediary also emerges in his experiments with mind-expanding drugs. Morrison was inspired by the mystical, symbolist

lyrical poetry of artist William Blake (1757-1827), whom he greatly admired and who had a strong belief in the liberating power of the imagination. Blake wrote: 'There are things that are known and things that are unknown; in between are doors...' (Fowlie 1993: 11, 76). According to Hopkins, Morrison's biographer, Morrison would like to have taken on this role of door (Hopkins and Sugerman 1980: 58). The idea of putting this into practice through drugs came after reading Aldous Huxley's *The Doors of Perception*, which details the author's experiences when taking mescaline. Morrison consequently named the band after these doors of Huxley, thereby presenting himself at one and the same time as a key to another, subversive world.<sup>16</sup> He was suggesting that he and his band could play an intermediary role between the known and the unknown, between the perception of everyday life and the life beyond.

### The Espace Morrison

Fieldwork at Père Lachaise has demonstrated how the many visitors and the active fan culture have expanded the material *pleine-terre* of a rectangle of sand as a social construct to become the performative *espace Morrison*. Today, the barriers guide and constrain both the behavior and freedom of movement of the public and the performativity of the grave in general. As a result, although opportunities for communication, contemplation and rituality, for approaching the monument, showing homage, placing objects or taking photos may have changed, they have not disappeared. The measures were designed to protect the site and to safeguard the cemetery against behavior deemed inappropriate. The result is that people tend to make shorter visits, and in-group fans who appropriate and demarcate the space by sitting or lounging around have become a thing of the past. Given that, in the past, Morrison fans had in effect erected their own barrier around the *espace Morrison* through their behavior; the disappearance of this behavior has made the grave more accessible to visitors who do not belong to the in-group fan culture.

In my fieldwork, I have been able to identify different groups of visitors.<sup>17</sup> Firstly, there are those who visit the grave as a tourist site or as part of cultural heritage. This includes tour groups on general Paris tours (group A), guided



*A visitor draws the grave as part of a process of spiritual communication with Jim Morrison. Photo: P.J. Margry.*

tours organized by the management of Père Lachaise for those interested in the cemetery and its famous dead (group B), and individuals and families who visit Père Lachaise independently as a cultural-historical monument, perhaps in connection with the celebrity route set out by the cemetery's management (group C). Visits by groups A and B are generally fairly large-scale, quantitatively dominant, and of short duration. They tend to be casual spectators who cast a brief glance at the grave, and who usually just say the singer's name aloud, out of surprise or in verification. For the rest, they include Morrison fans who have chosen this particular excursion so that they can visit the grave in an easy, organized way.

Secondly, there is a less easily definable group of Morrison and Doors 'fans.' The term is a broad, diffuse one, as Hills has revealed (Hills 2002). However, without wishing to suggest that other visitors are not fans (they often are), I use the term 'fan' to mean those who see themselves as 'true' fans, as part of the Morrison scene around his grave. The narratives about how they became fans and how they profess this closely resemble the conversion stories from

fans of other music idols (cf. Cavicchi 1998: 38-59). The fan scene around the grave is the second general category, and it can be further subdivided into three subgroups.<sup>18</sup> One group (group D) is interested primarily in the music of the Doors/Morrison. A second, smaller group (group E) focuses on the music and lifestyle in close connection with Morrison's iconic dimensions. The music is also important for a third, smaller group (group F), but they visit the site for its intrinsic qualities arising out of Morrison's spiritual-religious significance and that of his vision and writing. Although groups E and F, which may sometimes overlap, are considerably smaller than (hundreds) the first groups, these fans tend to stay longer at the grave, returning regularly in the course of a day or several days. Their visits also specially take account of Morrison's birthday and the anniversary of his death.

The grave has become increasingly contested as a result of growing numbers of visitors with different backgrounds, motivations and behaviors. Within all visitor categories, we find a heterogeneous international origin, with the vast majority being white Europeans and North and South Americans. They include proportionately more Americans, Canadians, Germans, Italians, English, French, Dutch and Swiss. Generally speaking, these groups – which are roughly distinguishable and certainly not mutually exclusive – can be identified by the way in which they come to the grave and the behavior that they exhibit there. The tour groups are instantly recognizable, but so too are the fans in general, primarily through their appearance, their clothing and the attributes they bring with them. Almost all carry explicit references to Morrison, either in the form of tattoos on their body or texts, images, or objects printed on or attached to their clothing. A significant proportion of fans use boots, clothing (leather), jewelry, sunglasses, or hairstyle to try to imitate Morrison's appearance. In addition, the fans in group E make their presence felt through their high spirits and boisterous behavior. Group E consists of a core group of several dozen people, spread across different generations, most of whom come back every year, plus a changing ad hoc group who show an affinity and join in temporarily with the core group during their visit to the grave. These fans are characterized by a strong sense of group membership, with a shared collective identity based on adoration of their idol. Because of their close, in-

timate bond, the core group also calls itself a *family* (cf. Fournier and Jiménez 2004). However, Maffesoli's theoretical concept of *tribus* seems to be more appropriate for group E as a whole. After all, this group is global in character and is only constructed at the site of the grave and its surroundings. They see the site first and foremost as a meeting place of kindred spirits where a certain ambience subsequently arises, a state of mind which is expressed through the Jim Morrison lifestyle (cf. Maffesoli 1996: 98). Because of this collective identity, the social context and their behavior, group E fans differ markedly from those in group F. The latter usually visit the grave individually or with a traveling companion with whom they share a strong bond of trust. They approach the site much more cautiously, before opting to spend time in quiet reflection or contemplation at the graveside.<sup>19</sup> As Erving Goffman says, they have drawn a 'circle of the self,' as it were. An authority on Père Lachaise wrote in 1982 that the more spiritually-inclined fans would sit close to the grave and 'remain thoughtful, usually with their head in their hands, for a long time, a very long time' (De Langlade 1982/2002: 72).<sup>20</sup> When the site fills up with groups of tourists, these fans withdraw to the background. The tension between the groups is illustrated by F., a Dutchman (1967) who says: 'I avoid the days commemorating his birth and death, because that's when you often find the most irritating 'fans': loud and coarse in their efforts to be like Jim. I prefer to go on quiet days.' H. (1973) has this to say: '[I] always try to be alone, then I can talk to Jim in my thoughts.' Group F fans tend to spend longer at the grave and to view it from different vantage points. More than the other groups, they are the ones who bring a text from home to deposit at the grave and who are more critical and particular when capturing the site on a photo. They quite often come alone or in pairs, a small majority are women, they are often single, and for most, their year of birth is spread fairly equally between 1960 and 1990.

A visitor analysis makes it clear just how much the Morrison grave has become a polymorphous sacred site, but also how much tourism, 'tribal cult,' and pilgrimage run parallel and overlap with one another. This picture, born of a broad socio-cultural stratification with a wide variety of ritual repertoires, ties in closely with Eade and Sallnow's theoretical model of contested places of pilgrimage (Eade and Sallnow 2000).

## The Religious Factor

In this section I will attempt to show whether, within the fan scene around his grave, Morrison is viewed as someone with certain divine or sacred qualities, or at least as someone who can arouse religious or spiritual feelings among his fans. Or in other words, is there for visiting fans also a certain religious perspective in the way they approach the person of Morrison and make a pilgrimage to the grave as a holy place?<sup>21</sup> Such a perspective, and here I am following Clifford Geertz, would move fans 'beyond the realities of everyday life to wider ones which correct and complete them, and its defining concern is to accept and have faith in those wider realities' (Geertz 1973: 112). The question is whether that indeed is the case. In more general terms, however, it has been established that young people construct personal frameworks of meaning and religiosity within the cultural fragmentation in which they live (Prins 2006). Research in the Netherlands and elsewhere has revealed that in the group of 18- to 30-year-old non-church members, almost half believe that they can derive religiosity and/or inspiration from pop musicians (Kregting and Sanders 2003: 14).<sup>22</sup> With regard to the musical supply, Schwarze



*Visitor in reflection at Morrison's grave, 2000. Photo: M. Campbell.*

established that rock and pop music articulates an individualized, non-institutionalized and estheticized ('gnostic') religiosity (Schwarze 1997: 241-248).<sup>23</sup> This is reflected concretely in ethnographic research into Bruce Springsteen fans (Cavicchi 1998: 184-189).

It is against this backdrop that I have linked my fieldwork data to Glock's still useful theoretical scheme, comprising five categories or dimensions (ideological, experiential, ritualistic, intellectual and consequential). Charles Glock, an American sociologist of religion, devised these dimensions in order to identify and label the various components of any religious perspective within a given phenomenon (Glock 1962; 1974). I will now discuss these dimensions one by one in relation to my fieldwork observations.

1. The ideological dimension ('doctrine') concerns religious commitment: what those involved believe or believe in. However, there is no formal discourse about a general ideology, let alone theology, surrounding the person of Jim Morrison. Nonetheless, when asked, most visitors in groups E and F articulate the ideological meanings that Morrison has for them. Nineteen-year-old Mandy, a percussionist and saxophonist from Muskegon in Michigan, 'feels



*Visitor to the grave, May 2004. Photo: P.J. Margry.*

the freedom.' For her, the visit to his grave is 'the reaffirmation of being confronted with a sort of big thing; something bigger than life.' Another American (29) thought that Morrison had a 'higher stature,' 'he makes people think; he is a free spirit.' For two women (25), friends from Dunkirk, he represents a mystical form of '*l'espoir*' [hope] because 'what you don't understand, he makes comprehensible.' Two young men from Darmstadt (23) felt that Morrison 'can give something, or something different, that the church can't give.'<sup>24</sup> According to them, Morrison had an idea, namely the 'insight that meaninglessness of life – as a fact – can open up other ways.'<sup>25</sup> He thus provides them with an alternative basis for the search for another meaning or purpose in life. For Martina (21) and Marigina (20), two students from Bologna, Jim prompted them to '*riflettere sulla vita e aldila*' [reflect on life and the hereafter]; he is able to '*risolvere problemi*' [solve problems]. Martina believed in his power within the '*supernaturale*.' In her view, because Morrison rejected the traditional social order and was influenced by Native American spirituality, he was able to create visionary poetry and an alternative spirituality. Therefore, the specific way in which fans interpret Morrison focuses primarily on his significance as a musician, songwriter and poet ('you'll always be a word man,' wrote one fan on July 3, 2005), as well as on his personal search for freedom and spirituality. In that respect, there is a connection with the intellectual dimension, including the ideological principles that Morrison put in writing.

2. The experiential dimension refers to religious feeling, or emotion, and points to the recognition or consciousness of the transcendental or divine. For a 20-year-old man from Naples, who traveled especially to Paris, Morrison's grave offered an immediate spiritual power that becomes knowable, or 'comes out' at that place, and is 'passed on.' Two Canadians were only willing to say that they found 'support' at the grave. Others experience an affinity with the mysterious, the mystical. For example, a 20-year-old from the Dutch town of Deurne felt the 'impact' that Jim has on him, but 'rituals and stuff' do not come into it for him. For another musician (24) from Naples, the visit was an '*evento*' with a '*motivo spirituale*,' something which he preferred not to elaborate on. The American musician Mandy had a 'spiritual feeling' and re-



*Some visitors experience a strong need to touch the grave and/or bust, 1992.  
Photo: M. Campbell.*

ceived an inner power: 'I had to come to the grave.' Maria (22) from Hannover described him as a genius: 'He determines my thoughts. Now I'm where he is and I want to experience something with him.' Jim shows her the other side of life, a side that he himself has already experienced and which now opens for her like a 'new page.' Carissa (21) and Sophia (22) from the United States have been listening to his music and reading his poems since they were twelve. For them, 'he's right about a lot of things; Jim opened our minds and, also, sex is in the center of life.' Morrison also gives them a degree of 'guidance, consolation and relief.' But as they themselves say, 'that is the grey area of spirituality.' Silas from Switzerland, who was given the trip to the grave by his mother as a present for his eighteenth birthday, visited the site in 2004 so that he could come into closer contact with Morrison through a kind of '*spirituelle Kommunikation*.' This was why he kept returning to the grave over several consecutive days. The above-mentioned Dorothea from Hamburg, who had been committed to Jim and his music from the age of 16, felt 'as if the spirit of one person enters the spirit of another' and in this way part of his aura entered into

hers. She had always felt Jim's aura and 'from time to time his spirit reappears to me at this spot and I can communicate with him.'<sup>26</sup>

On July 2, 2005, Ted S., an American, placed the following message on his grave:

Dear Jim,  
Thank you for everything.  
Years ago I had a vision  
and in it you told me to  
keep the flame alive. I  
now promise you I will.  
You have my word. Please  
give me any help you  
can, and watch over me.  
I will make you proud.  
Thank you.

In these few sentences the writer declares that he had had a vision of Morrison, in which he was given a task which he seemingly, only now, has come to confirm at the grave. At the same time, he calls upon Morrison's support and protection. Clearly, Morrison occupies a supernatural and transcendental position here.

Finally, what matters to various people interviewed is their perception that their experiences or life situations are similar to Morrison's. Analogies – experiencing similar situations and viewing things in a similar way – can create a bond and thus provide support. Another fan said that Jim sensed his difficulties and recognized his frustrations. So the young man from Zürich is 'not alone' with his thoughts – 'Jim felt the same way I did.' Sometimes the experiences themselves are separate from the physical locality. A 20-year-old woman from Vilnius in Latvia experienced a 'metaphysical and peaceful feeling' just from looking at photos of the grave.<sup>27</sup> The different examples clearly show that, for his fans, there is a transcendental relationship between Morrison and his grave.

3. The presence of a ritualistic dimension can also point to religious practices. The public behaviors and rituals manifested by fans on and around Morrison's grave display first of all a certain communality with or resemblance to more universal practices surrounding the dead, idols or saints. Despite parallels with rituals from Christian culture, they do not necessarily or solely point to religious dimensions. To a degree, they are part of the secular fan scene around the grave. Whatever the case may be, they vary enormously in form and execution, often tailored to Morrison and the life he led – a life of singing, making music, writing poems, as well as taking drugs, activities to which the fans themselves have given performative shape in *imitatio* at the graveside. The same applies to the drinking bouts that took place there until recently. By leaving behind bottles of whisky and allowing the alcohol to drain down into the sandy grave, fans sought to ensure that the liquid reached Morrison's body. Some hoped in this way to make closer contact with his person or spirit.

The chaos, graffiti and litter that accompany all these activities are a characteristic feature of the creation of the *espace Morrison*, a chaos that is said to be typical of Morrison. Various people interviewed said that the mess and graffiti had not bothered them in the slightest: 'It just goes with Jim Morrison.' In an interview with Reuters in 2004, Christian Charlet, the cemetery's historian, said: 'People come here not to worship the dead, but think they can do what they want, as if it was a rave party.' Here he misunderstood the specific, distinctive forms of idolization being expressed by Morrison fans. Camilita (\*1979) from Norway says that the texts or graffiti are 'letters of love, respect and sadness,' although many fans in fact view them as expressions of lack of respect.

The barriers now make it almost impossible to come into physical contact with the grave. While the fan scene may complain about this, it is the spiritually-inclined who are the most disappointed. Martina and Marigina from Bologna experienced it as '*brutto non toccare la tomba*' [It's mean that you can't touch the grave]. It also meant that they could not properly place the 'guiding feather' (*Piuma guida*) that they had brought with them as a tribute and offer to Morrison's bond with the Native American shaman. Another visitor, angry at the presence of the barrier, tried an alternative means of appropriating the grave for herself by making a drawing of it.

Before Morrison's bust was stolen from the headstone, almost all fans laid their hand on the stone head as part of their visit. This is the object that they miss most. They also felt an overwhelming need to touch the headstone or copper plaque at least once during their visit. But the desire for physical contact was sometimes expressed in very different ways, like the girl who straddled Morrison's grave and then bared her breasts so that she could offer herself to Morrison and still unite with him, as it were. Another fan lay down on the grave and experienced a 'reincarnation.' For others, this spot was the ultimate location for making love.

The most common ritual, which has declined significantly since the erection of the barriers, is to give or place objects or messages. We encounter the following gifts: cigarettes, drugs (joints, packets of hashish),<sup>28</sup> alcohol, Morrison portraits and busts, flags (some with drawings), cloths, T-shirts, shawls, caps, stones, plants and flowers. People also place burning candles and incense. Important in terms of content are the ritually deposited letters and poems, photos and drawings. A musician from Naples tossed a sheet of lyrics that he had written onto the grave, in homage to his great role model. When asked, he said that he was also hoping to bring down success upon himself. His preference would have been to burn the paper at the site in order to make a greater impact, but in the end he did not dare because of the security around the grave. This would also have been a way to keep your communication private – as indeed sometimes happens – as others conceal their intimate words or requests to Morrison by folding their message several times before throwing it publicly on the grave.

Fans not only leave objects behind; until a few years ago, they frequently took flowers, stones, or sand from the grave away with them, which meant that the sandy, open grave had to be replenished regularly. Now that the barriers are in place, items can no longer be removed, but this does not prevent fans from taking sand or pebbles, albeit from the ground as close as possible to the grave. As a young Dutchwoman explains, this is for the 'feeling that I have something of "him" at home'. For many fans, photos taken at the graveside suffice as an important souvenir of their visit.

Both today and in the past, visitors have taken objects given to Morrison,

sometimes even shortly after a fan has left them behind. And if this does not happen, then it is often the guards who clear away the material after closing time.<sup>29</sup>

For about two decades, one of the most characteristic forms of rituality surrounding Morrison was the large-scale writing of graffiti in the area around the grave. Although the graffiti writers usually recorded their own names, or Morrison's name ('Jim'), many also quoted from his repertoire of lyrics and poems. In addition, some texts made more explicit reference to the expectations of the visitors. The occasional researcher has interpreted this as a parallel to the Catholic church's books of wishes, placed in shrines for visitors to record their reflections, prayers, words of thanks, and expressions of love and sorrow. The walls of the burial chapel seem to play a similar role here, expressing through texts the emotions that 'weigh down' fans (De Langlade 1982/2002: 72). Almost all graffiti was removed in a major clean-up operation in 2004.

Visitors with a religious or spiritual motivation (group F) tend to distance themselves from the group nature of the fan scene, desiring above all peace and quiet at the graveside, or as one young man put it: 'Peace and quiet to reflect.' For them, it is a place of contemplation and meditation. However, this group also includes people who want to touch the grave and to take something tangible away with them. The letters placed on the grave, often expressing more considered personal thoughts and reflections (see 2 above), could offer valuable insights into people's motivations, but almost all are taken by other fans or cleared away and destroyed by cemetery staff.

4. According to Glock, the intellectual dimension is a reaction to the content and meaning of the related (holy) texts. In rock music, the conscious use of lyrics for defined countercultural purposes gave the music a new social function and added more weight to them (Dunbar 2002: 4-5). Jim Morrison has made a powerful, essential contribution to that development in general. In part because he was so widely read, he built up a repertoire of lyrics in which the existential – death is never far away – is continually addressed. As Morrison grew older, his poetry became more important to him. In an interview about the art

of poetry in general, he said: 'It's so eternal (...) Nothing else can survive a holocaust, but poetry and songs' (Hopkins 1981: 55). For many fans in group F, the significance of Morrison's collected writings and lyrics transcends that of the music itself. In many respects these texts function as sources of inspiration and as a guide to the meaning of life and its supernatural aspects. There is a certain overlap here with the above-mentioned ideological dimension, in which his texts also function as a canon. For some, the visionary element that characterizes his poems is essential to his perceived supernatural qualities. In any case, we see a clear division between the readers and the non-readers of his poems. While almost all in-group fans own editions of his poems, most in group E do not read them (cf. Janssen 1994: 164). They usually find it difficult to come to grips with the content, or as Heerko (\*1973) from the Netherlands put it: 'No, [I] can't follow Jim on that plane, nobody can.' Those in group F, on the other hand, are more receptive to his poetic work, turning to it and deriving support from it in times of trouble. Roby (\*1984) from Bergamo says: '*Mi danno molto sostegno a volte*' [He sometimes gives me a lot of support]; a Dutchman says: 'Yes, support, but I can't really put it into words'; and Marieke (\*1969) says: 'in difficult times I find support in Jim's texts.' These comments reveal that Morrison's text corpus can offer his fans support or consolation for their existential problems.

5. Finally, the consequential dimension reflects the religious effects or consequences of the form of religiosity in question: what people can expect or what is expected of them as a consequence of their religiosity. We can think here of spiritual harmony, peace of mind, freedom from care, health, well-being, release, etc.

Until the big clean-up at Père Lachaise in 2004, a large piece of graffiti – 'Thanks for helping me Jim, 14/11/92' – still adorned a crypt next to Morrison's grave. This is a clear reference to the fact that, after his death, Morrison in some way helped the person who wrote it. When her father was ill, T. (\*1968) went especially to Paris to enlist Jim's help. Letter writer Ted, quoted above in 2, is a further powerful example of someone asking Morrison for help and protection. We can deduce from these and comparable texts that some fans at-

tribute to the deceased Morrison a special, effectual power. We observe something similar with a 33-year-old musician from Quito who asked Morrison for strength, inspiration and assistance in establishing his own music career. To this end, he spent a long time at the graveside, taking photos from every possible angle. For some, Morrison is also an anti-role model in certain respects. With his help they hope, like an 18-year-old Swiss boy, to find the strength to either resist or overcome drug addiction. Jan K., a Danish ex-hippie, paid homage to Jim's grave after winning the battle with alcohol at the time of the twentieth anniversary of Morrison's death. An Englishman (\*1980), knowing that 'deep inside' Jim was against heroin, asked for his help with his own addiction.<sup>30</sup> During her second trip to the grave, Dorothea from Hamburg said that he gives comfort and support for the immense 'helplessness' that she experiences in everyday life.

Relating Glock's five theoretical dimensions to the fieldwork findings has generated a better understanding of the forms of religiosity displayed around Jim Morrison's grave at Père Lachaise. The study shows that, for a specific portion of the fan scene, Morrison has a religious significance and function. It is not easy to categorize this form of religiosity within what is broadly labeled 'the holistic milieu' or part of the associated 'spiritual revolution.' Although, like the New Age, the Morrison cult has arisen in relation to processes of secularization and individualization, I do not perceive a direct connection and regard it as an independent form of religious expression linked to a clear cult object, originating from that same massive subjective turn of modern culture (cf. Heelas and Woodhead 2005: 129-130). For one specific, reflective group of fans, singer/writer Morrison is therefore a person of transcendental significance who gives them meaning. For the E group, the in-crowd of Morrison followers, his importance is determined largely by an 'all-significant philosophy of life,' as Söderholm has shown.<sup>31</sup>

## Conclusion

This study examined the different fan cultures exhibited on and around Père Lachaise by visitors to Morrison's grave. It became apparent that although the different narratives constructed in past decades around the person of Jim Morrison and his grave may in general be shared, their meanings differ markedly.

There is no doubt that the fan cultures have constructed the grave into a special, sacred and performatively powerful place. Morrison is 'represented' there by a broad fan scene as an idol and role model. My next step was to examine the fans from a religious, transcendental perspective. I wanted to identify the extent to which the many references to pilgrimage, saint, and cult owed their existence to a religious or spiritual inspiration or motivation among certain visitors or whether these were purely metaphorical attributions of pilgrimage.

The processing of the fieldwork data clearly demonstrated that for part of the fan scene – the more individually and reflectively-inclined fans (group F) – a religious inspiration or dimension played a vital role in their visit and in their lives. As a result of his charisma, his performances and verbal and writing abilities, Morrison presented and created alternatives that differed in a socio-religious sense from those of mainstream society and Christianity. For these fans, he emerges as a source of spiritual inspiration in their personal lives, and acts as an intermediary between different spheres or domains, namely that of everyday life and the metaphysical. In visiting this place, these visitors are seeking salvation.

Therefore, notwithstanding the cultural interferences that cloud the picture somewhat through mediatization, Christian and other religious-ecclesiastical connotations and symbolism, this study highlights the fact that for a specific group of fans, Morrison functions as an independent cult object and as a more-or-less independent cult that is not part of a broader system of meaning. These fans regard his grave as a holy place. They clearly do in fact make a pilgrimage there, in part because of the site's supposed supportive and healing qualities.

The study shows that this last point does not apply to other groups of fans like the close-knit Morrison tribe (group E), let alone the touristically-inclined visitors. As a rule, they have little or no affinity with Morrison as a poet or

thinker, or with any metaphysical qualities he might have, or his religious immanence. For them, Morrison is first and foremost a rock idol, a performer and, in lifestyle terms, a role model. One thing is certain, all these different group perspectives have made Morrison's grave a contested space where popular culture, global tourism, neo-tribalism, individualism and religion encounter one another.

## Notes

1 All visitor quotes come from fieldwork carried out by the author at and around Morrison's grave on May 20-23, July 2-4 and December 8, 2004, and July 2-3, 2005, and from a separate questionnaire sent out in 2005.

2 *'Vor allem tat es mir weh für Jim Morrison selber. Für ihn waren Barrieren ja das Schlimmste was es gab. Die Dinge, die Jim immer hat verhindern wollen, sind dreißig Jahre nach seinem Tode doch Wirklichkeit geworden. Er ist schließlich dennoch eingesperrt.'*

3 The most important books about his life and death are Hopkins and Sugeran 1980; Riordan and Prochnicky 1991; Densmore 1990; on his death, see also Van Alphen 1980: 70-73.

4 The grave is located in the sixth division of the cemetery; various publications pay attention to the grave, also visually. Jones 1990: 184-191; Campbell 2001 and 2004; Reed and Miller 2005: 34-37.

5 For example, in *The tenth life of Jim Morrison*, the Dutch writer Ineke Verheul describes Morrison as still living on. She attempts to place herself in the singer's thoughts and spirit and describes his adventures after his death.

6 An American journalist, Brett Meisner, claims to have proof of Morrison's death from a 'miraculous' photograph taken in 1997 on which the 'ghost' of Morrison appears next to the grave in Paris; cf. the video footage on [www.brettmeisner.com/](http://www.brettmeisner.com/), last visited on December 3, 2007.

7 See <http://archives.waiting-forthe-sun.net/Pages/Players/Professional/brotsky.html>.

8 <http://messageboard.thedoors.com/lofiversion/index.php/t27378-50.html> (November 5 and 29, 2005, page last visited on October 24, 2006).

9 This plaque reads: 'James Douglas Morrison 1943 – 1971 Kata ton daimona eaytoy.' The Greek text means 'in accordance with his own spirit,' which can be interpreted as a reference to the obstinate way in which he led his own life. Even this text has spawned a host of weird and wonderful translations and interpretations about what happened to Morrison.

10 At least once a week, cemetery workers remove all materials thrown onto the grave; it is then taken away as litter.

11 This was not the first time. The grave was temporarily closed to the public during the second half of 1988; see Söderholm 1990: 303.

12 In 2001 more than one million visitors (the city published an official figure of 1.5 million); no formal counts are conducted, however.

13 Rainer Moddemann, *Jim Morrison. Paris – Führer* (www: Kreuzfeldt Electronic Publishing, 2003); an abridged version in English can be consulted on the Internet: The complete Paris Guide for Jim Morrison fans: <http://www.geocities.com/SunsetStrip/Palladium/1409/jimparis.htm>; see also: Rainer Moddemann, *Jim Morrison's Quiet Days in Paris* (1999).

14 Frijhoff has repeatedly made critical evaluations of his own model; he now recognizes the

importance of including the concept of 'heroes' in the analysis, either placing it alongside or substituting it for 'saints'; see Van Eijnatten 2007: 419-438.

15 See my contribution to the publication to mark Prof. Frijhoff's departure. Contributors were asked to submit articles based on Frijhoff's research model (Van Eijnatten 2007: 377-392).

16 For example, the word 'snake' that recurs in his lyrics is supposedly a metaphor for a consciousness-expanding journey, as an expression of 'subversive fantasy.' See Rodenberg 1983: 166-181.

17 This stratification is often not properly recognized. For example, in an interview in 1993, the well-informed Gilles Yepremian reduced visitors to mere tourists: 'Now the grave is like a tourist monument, not because of Jim but for curiosity. This image was refined by Fournier and Jiménez in 2004.

18 Fournier and Jiménez (2004) distinguish three other categories: '*admiradores*,' '*seguidores*' and '*fanáticos*.'

19 In addition to conversations with visitors in general, I also observed the visitors and held interviews with fans (groups E and F), whom I identified on the basis of their behaviour and external appearance.

20 '*Demeurent pensifs, le plus souvent la tête dans les mains, un long, très long moment.*'

21 I do not agree with Thomas (2006: 21-22) who classifies Morrison's grave as a 'spontaneous shrine'; being a long existing formal grave and tomb, this is definitely not the case.

22 Both academics and artists frequently compare and describe pop music and religion in general. Of the latter group, Graham made a documentary in 1984 entitled *Rock my Religion*, in which he uses Jim Morrison, among others, to establish a broad connection between rock, religion, sex and capitalism. According to Graham, Morrison's shamanism is comparable to Pentacostal experiences and performances. For this documentary, see Elke Town (ed.) (1986), *Video by Artists 2*. Toronto: Art Metropole, pp. 81-111.

23 Schwarze applied Peter Sloterdijk's religious-philosophical principle of gnosis as an open interpretation model in order to identify the features of connecting forms of religious expression, (Schwarze 1997: 103-111).

24 '*Etwas oder etwas anderes geben kann, das die Kirche nicht geben kann.*'

25 '*Erkenntnis, dass der Sinnlosigkeit – als Fakt – des Lebens andere Wegen eröffnen kann.*'

26 '*Dann und wann erscheint mir an dieser Stelle sein Geist wieder und kann ich mit ihm kommunizieren.*'

27 Email of January 5, 2001, to the official Doors website (thedoors.com), showing photos by Michelle Campbell of the scene around the grave.

28 Rainer Moddemann (April 1993): Gilles Yepremian on the initial years after 1971, 'In the beginning you could always find joints and drugs on the grave.'

29 There are several larger private collections belonging to guides and frequent local visitors who for years have taken and kept letters and other objects.

30 From an email of May 5, 2004, to the official Doors website (thedoors.com).

31 Söderholm's study, in Finnish, is rarely cited because it is difficult to access, both physically and in terms of language.