

REIMAGINING MORRIS'S THEORY ON WORK AND LEISURE IN THE CONTEXT OF FOOTBALL

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I. The Impetus for, and The Beginning of, My Ethnographic Encounters Project

A fledgling interest in Karl Marx led me to William Morris, a nineteenth century British Socialist, whom I encountered accidentally. I was soon struck by Morris, and sought to reimagine his theories in the modern era. In particular, I was interested in Morris's theory on work and leisure, which I hoped to apply uniquely. I befit this theory to semi-professional athletics, and questioned whether work and leisure could be defined concomitantly. A semi-professional athlete whom I had known as a child served as my template, for he was both a tradesman by day and a shortstop by night. As I recalled the Diamond Baseball Club through the lens of Morris, I thought it a fitting case study. But miles and years were insuperable, and baseball proved a little-known American pastime. I replaced baseball more aptly with football, and searched for a semi-professional team in Fife. I enquired at Tayport Football Club and met Graeme*, who was the only athlete willing to be interviewed. Perhaps as a university student himself, Graeme empathised with my Project and me. 'I'll answer as many questions as you'd like,' he said, and a four-month friendship ensued.

II. Defining Morris's Theory on Work and Leisure

My research made apparent ten conditions which must be met in order for work to be considered leisure by Morrisean standards. Here work and leisure are concomitant when work is pleasurable, freely undertaken, creative, vocational, varied, useful, outdoors, mental, manual and communal. I shaped my ethnography around these conditions, and

*Participant asked that his name be withheld and exchanged for another

benefit them to Tayport Football Club. To adhere to Morris's theory on work and leisure, the Club must meet the conditions upon which the theory rests.

III. Applying Morris's Theory on Work and Leisure to Tayport Football Club

Though it is but one of ten conditions, pleasure is the nexus of Morris's theory on work and leisure. To Morris, pleasure gives meaning to 'labour [...] and the labourer' (Kinna 2000: 503) because it is anathema to 'drudgery' (Thompson 2011: 646). Indeed Morris believed that 'the pleasurable exercise of our energies is [...] the source of all art and [...] happiness,' (Kinna 2000: 512) for it gives us 'purpose' (Thompson 2011: 646). During my first interview with Graeme, I asked him whether playing football for Tayport was pleasurable. I explained that 'pleasure' was a term preferred by Morris, and Graeme nodded accordingly. 'It is very "pleasurable" for me to play for Tayport,' he said, 'I really enjoy the dressing room camaraderie and the challenge each match poses.' After attending my fourth Tayport match, Graeme invited me to a team meal. The athletes looked disapprovingly at the 'stovies'¹ placed before them, but soon spoke about the game with wry smiles. 'Number twelve was absolutely brutal,' Graeme said to his teammate Connor, referencing the player whom he had defended. 'Yeah, he was rubbish' Connor assented, 'he was doing my head in.' Graeme and Connor sniggered between bites, and shouted, 'See you later, mate!' as the goalkeeper, Danny, left for 'The Pondy,' a local pub. 'When I'm with these guys, I often lose track of time,' Graeme admitted, 'they put me at ease, and I spend most evenings in their company.' I recalled Morris writing, 'work hours should pass swiftly and pleasantly,' and I knew at once that Graeme shared his sentiment (Kinna 2000: 503).

¹ A potato and minced meat mixture

I was certain that playing football for Tayport was pleasurable to Graeme, and imagined that his position as defender was freely undertaken. After all, Graeme had signed a contract and willingly attended trainings and matches for two years. Yet Morris, like Fourier, argued that for work to be leisure, it must be 'completed voluntarily [...] for the love [...]of its results' (Kinna 2000: 502). Though Graeme '[did] not feel forced to play for Tayport,' he conceded that 'doing something voluntarily and doing something that you love is not always the same thing.' Perhaps Morris, who 'found total satisfaction in his own work,' had unknowingly conflated the terms (Thompson 2011: 646). But this was little deterrence to Graeme, who quipped, 'I really do love football, though.' It was thus apparent that Graeme played football freely, and did so with a 'love' that would have pleased Morris.

As a carpenter, Morris placed due emphasis upon creativity. Creativity to Morris was 'inimical to mechanisation,' and to the 'division of labour' (Kinna 2000: 503). Work could then be likened to leisure when 'it granted...unrestricted freedom of expression,' and was centred around 'the individual' (Kinna 2000: 503). Yet creativity as a condition of Morris's theory on work and leisure is problematic, for it undervalues teamwork. Here the 'division of labour' is pitted against 'the individual,' who neither works in a team nor towards a common goal. But in an ironic turn, Morris came to accept 'labour distinctions [in order to]embrace cooperation and collectivism' (Snape 2015: 69), leaving his opinion more uncertain than ever (Delveaux 2005: 113). I too was uncertain, and felt that Morris was a man of many personalities. I asked Graeme about creativity, and hoped that he would help me solve this Morrisean enigma. 'Sometimes my creativity feels a little bit limited,' Graeme explained, 'mostly because of the way the coach asks me to play.' I attended one training, as Graeme assured me 'they're all the same,' and found it both mechanical and dull. Indeed Graeme and his teammates were asked to sprint thirty times over the course of an hour,

always across the width of the pitch. Ball skills were replaced with squats and lunges, beginning and ending with rhythmic timing upon the coach's whistle. Though Morris had amended his discourse on creativity, I was certain that he would never approve of Tayport training. Tayport athletes appear as automatons, playing in the same, numberless uniform with identical pace and tone. I imagined it the figment of Morris's nightmares as Graeme said, 'my abilities outwith the coach's requests are ignored.' Creativity was then the first of the ten conditions that Tayport Football Club failed to meet in light of Morris's theory on work and leisure.

I was certain that Graeme was a talented football player, and dismayed when his 'abilities' were 'ignored.' Morris was more fickle than I imagined, and had also left me deflated. With tired reluctance, I examined the fourth condition of Morris's theory and asked, 'Is Tayport Football vocational?' In his Socialist tracts, Morris argued that 'work would have to meet a vocation in order to be leisure' (Kinna 2000: 504). I asked Graeme whether playing football for Tayport allowed him to use a specific skillset, and he said yes. 'I feel I am skilled athletically, and playing for Tayport allows me to hone those skills,' he explained, 'I also have good interpersonal skills, and playing on a team helps me get to know other people.' Having then attended six matches and one training, I was certain that Tayport Football honed Graeme's athletic skills. Yet I knew very little about his teammates, and as such, could not gauge Graeme's relationship to them. I had asked a dozen Tayport footballers to speak with me, but was tersely refused. Graeme posited that I was 'too unlike them,' and offered to take me for a drive. After a quarter mile Graeme's coup swung curbside, and Matty, a teammate, jumped in the backseat. 'Meet Devon,' Graeme said, 'she's American and wants to talk with you.' I looked nervously at Graeme, and thanked him gratuitously in my mind. Matty explained to me that he and Graeme travelled to and from

every Tayport match together. 'We're mates,' he followed, as though I was uncertain. Despite his ready smile, Matty was unwilling to 'talk seriously' about Tayport Football, and thought it 'strange' that I wanted to. 'None of these guys have been to university,' Graeme later said to me, 'they don't want to talk to some girl who has.' I listened uneasily, and with resentment. Graeme watched my face knowingly, and promised that he would 'do [his] best to change [his teammates'] minds.'

Though my encounter with Matty had left me disheartened, I was certain that he and Graeme were friends, and that 'interpersonal skills' were necessary for teamwork. It was thus apparent that Tayport Football met the 'vocational' condition of Morris's theory on work and leisure. Whether Tayport Football was 'varied' proved less apparent. Morris had argued that work, in order to be leisure, must 'allow some scope for variation' (Kinna 2000: 504). The absence of variation in Tayport training had cast a dim view on Tayport matches, but Graeme disagreed. 'The matches aren't like the trainings,' he said, 'you play on different pitches against different teams in different formations. No two matches are the same because no two football teams are the same.' I knew at once that Graeme was right, and wondered why trainings and matches were so unlike. I then attended a Tayport match in St Andrews to discover whether 'home' and 'away' games were equally unlike. As Graeme had argued, St Andrews and Tayport were distinct as clubs and locales. Bratwurst and meat pies were passed between concession stands, and lawn chairs abutted a fence around the pitch. Tayport, by contrast, had concrete stadium seating and a halftime enclave for tea. The style of play was measuredly different, too. I observed the St Andrian midfielders as they transitioned forward in their attacking half. A reticent right defender also captured my attention, as he was overtaken time and again. After, I met Graeme and his father for a meal, and both were quick to offer a tactic assessment. 'St Andrews really fell short this

afternoon,' Graeme's father said, 'they ought to have pressed forward.' 'They didn't move the ball quickly enough,' Graeme followed, 'but they had good chances at net.' Though trainings were unchanged, I was certain that matches were not. Indeed matches changed weekly, and posed new challenges. I thus contend that Tayport Football is 'varied,' but in respect to matches only.

When asked whether Tayport Football was 'useful,' Graeme answered affirmatively and said, 'I can learn to appreciate how other people live and earn their money.' Morris, as a dystopic Socialist, would have approved. In regard to usefulness, Morris wrote only, 'work has to be useful in order to be leisure' (Kinna 2000: 505). Yet Morris, a fan of communes, delighted in 'learn[ing]' from 'other[s]'. 'You must be Morris himself!' I teased. I had imagined the 'use' of football practically: selling tickets, staying fit, making friends. Learning from others did not come to mind. I was struck by his altruism, and asked Graeme why he answered as he did. 'Most of the guys on the team work as painters and electricians, or on an oil rig. I really enjoy getting to know them.' At once, the nature of semi-professional athletics came to light. Every Tayport athlete, excluding Graeme, was otherwise employed. The lived experience of a Tayport athlete was thus very different from that of an amateur or professional counterpart. Indeed these men worked during the day, trained in the evening, and returned to their families 'after their children had fallen asleep.' Was football a 'useful' escape from the banality of a 9-to-5? Graeme thought so, but conceded that no Tayport athlete had professional football ambitions. 'None of us have illusions of grandeur. We all have goals beyond football. Tayport gives us some sense of fulfilment, but other things make us feel fulfilled too. I knew I was good enough to play for Tayport,' Graeme continued, 'and now I know that I can succeed elsewhere. Soon I'll have my degree, get a job, and move in with my girlfriend. All these things are possible.' It struck me that playing football for

Tayport had given Graeme the confidence to achieve. Tayport was thus a 'useful' means of encouragement, too.

As I unpacked Morris's theory on work and leisure, few conditions caught me by surprise. Though usefulness was not one such condition, outdoor activity was. In *News from Nowhere*, Morris evokes the Back to Land Movement of the late nineteenth century, calling for 'countrification,' or 'renewed contact with Nature' (Delveaux 2005: 135). The protagonist of Morris's novel, Guest, describes 'the greening of Trafalgar Square:' 'We came presently into a large open space...the sunny site of which had been taken advantage of for planting an orchard...of apricot trees...chequered over with the shadow of tall pear trees' (Delveaux 2005: 133). Though Guest and Morris demand the hegemony of Man and Nature, *News from Nowhere* is more Romantic than practical. Because outdoor activity at Tayport was more practical than Romantic, I was at odds with Morris's 'exotic imaginings' (Hale 2003: 250). I asked Graeme to describe Tayport's pitch, and he replied that it was 'too small, with more mud than grass.' The grounds of Tayport were no match for Guest's Trafalgar Square, and I wondered whether the 'green outdoors' were too 'alien' after all (Bolus-Reichert 2007: 74). I asked myself, 'Would Graeme's ideal pitch recall Morris's ideal Square?' I then posed a similar question to Graeme, and he said, 'The perfect pitch for me would be a grass pitch...and it would be very green and you would feel free from constraints. I would be able to play naturally and freely,' he finished, 'I wouldn't have any worries.' It struck me that Graeme's ideal pitch was very like Morris's ideal Square, and I wondered whether it could come to fruition. 'Do you know a pitch similar to the one you have described?' I asked. Graeme smiled, and answered 'I think I played on it Monday night!'

The Romantic in Morris was not unlike the Romantic in Graeme, and I was certain that Tayport's pitch would disappoint the former as it had the latter. Yet Tayport, like Morris, believed in 'exercising the energies of the body outdoors,' as trainings and matches made evident (Thompson 2011: 642). Though Tayport is no match for the 'decadence' of Morris's 'green fantasies,' the Club's relationship with the outdoors complements his theory on work and leisure (Hale 2003: 250). But for work to be leisure, it must also be mental and manual. Morris supposed that 'manual labour would grow into a pleasurable outdoor habit,' and supplant 'mental labour' (Hildebrand 2000: 4). My time with Graeme had made apparent the mental and manual components of Tayport Football, and we debated the 10,000 hours principle. 'I'm a firm believer in it,' Graeme said of the principle, 'you have to put 10,000 hours of practice into the sport of your choosing to become an elite athlete.' 'But mental discipline is required too,' I countered, 'and can take years to develop.' Graeme nodded accordingly, and asked me to join him for dinner. Though I was certain that Tayport Football was both mental and manual, I used the evening to gather examples. 'How is playing football for Tayport a mental game?' I asked. Graeme placed his menu aside and said, 'Well, you have to understand what the coach wants, what the tactics of the match will be, and what the abilities of your teammates are.' In anticipation of my next question, Graeme began, 'Then you have to play to your strengths and make up for your weaknesses, and that's all physical. It's all mental and manual,' he closed. Graeme yawned, and rubbed his eyes. After three lectures, a dissertation meeting, and Tayport training, Graeme met my inquiries with fatigue. 'Did you know that William only trains from 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM?' he said in reference to his brother, a professional football player. 'I did not,' I replied, 'how does that make you feel?' Graeme placed his hand on his cheek, and said, 'It makes me feel like I'm busting my ass for nothing.'

Though Tayport satisfies the mental and manual conditions of Morris's theory, these conditions are met with great toil. Graeme was exhausted, and paid a fraction of his brother's wage. I imagined that the fathers on the team, who Graeme said were unable to tuck their children into bed, felt similarly after split-shifts and match play. Whether Tayport Football is worth its mental and manual expense remains unclear. Because Tayport fans are themselves 'working class,' Graeme believed that they could 'empathize with the guys on the pitch.' 'They all grew up working long hours like us, and loving football like us, and wanting to achieve more,' he added. Morris envisioned a 'homogenous society partaking of an increasingly common culture,' and football, I argue, is the 'common culture' to which the 'homogenous society' of Tayport fans flock (Snape 2015: 53). Here 'the new day of fellowship' is grafted by men eating, drinking, and celebrating on behalf of their Club (Moir 1981: 268). 'I know the people of Tayport are very proud of us and our success,' Graeme said, 'and it's great that they all come together and catch up over some football.' Crucially, Tayport fans are an all-male, over sixty cohort who 'leave their wives at home each Saturday.' I was marginalised from the outset, and refused interviews. One fan, whom I had asked to speak with, clucked his tongue in admonition and said, 'The match is still on! There are minutes left to play! No one has time for you!' It was apparent that no one had time for me after the match, either. Though the candour of the pitch excluded women, the Tayport community was very impassioned. Because Morris called 'men of passion...a vision rather than a dream,' I am certain that the final condition of his theory on work and leisure, community, has been met (Moir 2011: 267).

IV. To What Degree Does Tayport Football Club Satisfy the Conditions of Morris's Theory on Work and Leisure?

While it is apparent that Morris did not centre his theory on work and leisure around semi-professional athletics, Tayport Football Club satisfies most of the theory's conditions. Indeed, eight of ten conditions were met by the Club, barring only 'creativity' and 'variation.' But while creativity was wholly absent from Tayport, variation was only absent in part. It is unclear whether Morris's theory requires all conditions to be satisfied, and whether quasi-satisfied conditions are valid. Though Tayport may not satisfy Morris's 'exotic imaginings,' I believe that it sets a 'real world' example. Like Guest's Trafalgar Square, Tayport is reimagined, but in practical terms. Thus while Morris may consider eight out of ten conditions too few, I do not. I argue that Tayport Football can be defined as work and leisure because it satisfies a majority of the conditions set forth by Morris's theory. In order to bring his theory to fruition, one must apply Morris's conditions to the 'real world,' and challenge the dystopia in which he writes. To accept a majority is then to accept the limitations of the 'real world,' and to re-contextualise Morris in it.

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