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"We do things differently here:" Manchester as a Cultural Region in *24 Hour Party People*

Introduction

A key discourse in the "new regional geography" and the geography of "New Regionalism" is the definition of the region as a *cultural space*. "Culture" refers to "the perceptual frames, values, and norms used in social life; as the way society looks at itself and as a filter for what it sees."[1] As it is associated with a particular territorial scale, the region is defined as "a specific set of cultural relationships between a group and particular places.… The region is a symbolic appropriation of a portion of space by such a group.… It is a psychological phenomenon and most definitions refer to as a body of meanings attached to a specific space."[2] From this perspective, the region is a "state of mind," an "imagined community,"[3] albeit one imagined at a different scale from that of the nation.

"Culture" also refers to the cultural industries present within a region that form the basis of a system of social communication, and includes the visual arts, the performing arts, films, broadcasting, photography, publishing, design and fashion, and the heritage industry. These industries contribute to the region in a

football."[5] In keeping with theories of postmodernism, it is a shift from a space defined by industrial activity ("Cottonopolis"

capital that bands from all over the country were inexorably drawn. Although Mick Middles claims that it was “parochial power that had fuelled the innovatory edges of the music indus

the nineteenth century a relatively coherent and conscious image of the ‘North’ of England divided off from the South has persisted:”

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bohemianism." Haslam argues that the designation of Castlefield as the UK's first "Urban Heritage Park," which he refers to as "death sentence heritage… re-creating a tourist version of the old days," was less significant than the cultural changes brought about by the Madchester era that made it possible to re-imagine the city: "It [Madchester] brought a thriving sub-culture to the surface, and marked the point when it seemed the city was no longer carrying the baggage of a hundred and fifty years of preconceptions, about the weather, the environment, the misery."[14]

As the phrase "working class bohemianism" indicates, the popular music scene that developed in Manchester in the wake of the Sex Pistols transgressed traditional cultural boundaries. It was comprised of a mixture of people from diverse backgrounds, and included working class Mancunians (e.g., Rob Gretton), art school graduates (e.g., Malcolm Garret, Peter Saville), and the self-conscious Situationism of university-educated intellectuals (e.g., Tony Wilson). It also mixed musical genres, bridging the divide between rock and dance music, as punk was crossed with electronica (e.g., New Order) or Northern Soul (e.g., Happy Mondays). The development of Manchester as 'pop cult city' also blurred the distinction between producers and consumers of cultural products, and created opportunities to *aestheticise* everyday life: "People began to see it as increasingly more viable to work in the production of their leisure time as mangers, promoters, visual designers, fashion designers, DJs, sound technicians, lifestyle journalists, bar and club architects and designers."[15] As Haslam puts it: "Fans have become bands, consumers have become producers; that's always the Manchester way."[16] For Haslam it is this hybridity that gives Manchester its unique cultural status:

where Wilson, Erasmus, and Lindsey Wilson share a joint. The only difference between these two scenes is that instead of getting their marijuana from the Sun Centre in Rhyl they now bring it in from Barbados. A closing title tells us that Wilson began a new record company in 1994, Factory Too, only for it to close in 1997, again indicating an open structure that is not confined by the film's periodisation of the Manchester scene (roughly 1976 to 1992), and that Wilson has learnt nothing from Factory's "experiment in human nature."[21]

The documentary style of *24 Hour Party People* is brought to the fore in the re-

news in the late 1970s over a series of images (the National Front marching in Manchester, fuel shortages, and strikes by public sector workers). The dawning of the Madchester era in the city is represented by a montage sequence of magazine covers (including the New Musical Express and Melody Maker) and images (e.g., record covers, posters) from the late 1980s, and to convey the rise of drug gangs in the city, newspaper headlines are similarly used to set the scene. At times the film comes across as a history lesson, with Wilson playing the role of reporter in the Hacienda; and in his role as narrator, he provides a “voice-of-God-like” commentary on the Manchester scene, often over shots of the ciof(e)47W Tf 0.0enhecov

films, and introduces elements of fantasy to this realist documentary aesthetic. The arrival of Bez on a flying saucer, and the cartoonish pigeons poisoned by the Ryder brothers, elevate historical events to the level of fantasy. Wilson's God-like status as narrator is given a fantastical twist in the last sequence when he has

synergy. They're a focus for creativity. When the Victorians built the railways they didn't just put up portacabins. They went to town.… Buildings change the

cappella soul version of Joy Division's "Love Will Tear Us Apart." The club is a single space, with no VIP area marked off, so the TV presenters, bands, managers, journalists, and fans all mingle in a single space. The first Joy Division performance at Factory begins with Curtis walking through the crowd to the stage, and on a number of occasions, Wilson, Erasmus, Lindsay, *et al*., are shown in the crowd at gigs again removing the separation between producers and consumers.

The Hacienda is also the focus for a localised, face-to-face group of cultural producers and consumers. It is, in Wilson's words, "a place for people we knew, people we could trust." After years of failure the Hacienda finally erupts in 1987 with the birth of "the dance age:" "Suddenly everything came together: the music, the dancing, the drugs, the venue, the city. I was proved right—Manchester was like renaissance Florence. Mike Pickering was right—you don't need bands in a club. Shaun Ryder was right. New Order were right. We all came together. Everyone came to the Hacienda. It was our cathedral." Again, the club is represented as a single space, in which the owners and customers are not separated, and this is particularly evident when Wilson finishes his piece to camera on the "birth of rave culture" and then dances with the unknown clubbers. The crowd in the Hacienda is represented not as a group of highly differentiated people but as a single mass within a single space, and Wilson notes that, with the birth of the dance age, social barriers are overcome as this is a time when "even the white man starts dancing."

These cultural spaces and networks evolve away from and in opposition to London, the traditional centre of the UK music industry. Matthew Higgs writes that "London, or more specifically its absence, is in many ways the subliminal

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canals, indicating the poverty of nostalgia. The film juxtaposes the Rochdale canal, which symbolises the era when Manchester was the "greatest industrial city of the world," the neglect of which mirrors the "decline of post-war industrial Britain," with the coolness of the emerging Madchester scene. This is most obvious in those shots that place Wilson next to his interviewee, inviting the viewer to contrast the tall, youthful, and knowledgeable (at least on the history of British canals) journalist, with the short, squat relic of the industrial age, who in his grey coat, scarf, and flat cap is a stereotype of the Northern, working class male. The North as the "locus for industrial images of the UK" is contrasted with images of the Happy Mondays on stage and the crowds at the Hacienda. In this way the film marks the shift from an industrial to a post-industrial age, the shift from "Cottonopolis" to "Madchester." However, this does not mean that the film rejects the past as an important factor in the construction of a Northern identity. *24 Hour Party People* breaks up the report on the canals of Manchester with a series of positive images of Manchester's history, representing Manchester as the home to epoch-making inventions that have transformed the world: it is the "birthplace of the railways [*sic*], the computer, the bouncing bomb." In associating Madchester with these innovations, the film sees the Manchester punk and rave scene as building on the city's proud history, and specifically demonstrates an awareness of this history. It seeks to build on a tradition of progressiveness that is projected as the antithesis of "death sentence heritage:" in comparing the Hacienda to the great public buildings of the Victorians (e.g., Manchester Town Hall) Wilson seeks to continue the great tradition of Manchester as "the most wonderful city of modern times."

Conclusion

Though *24 Hour Party People* is a film that narrates the lives and myths of Tony Wilson, Alan Erasmus, Rob Gretton, Joy Division, New Order, and the Happy Mondays, it is ultimately a film about the city itself. Significantly, the film is dedicated not to Martin Hannett or Ian Curtis, but to the people of Manchester. Though *24 Hour Party People* is nostalgic with regard to the musical heritage of the city, it is different from films such as *Velvet Goldmine* (Todd Haynes, 1997), *Still Crazy* (Brian Gibson, 1998), and *Almost Famous* (Cameron Crowe, 2000) that represent various aspects of a particular era in the history of rock music (the 1970s), in that its focus is as much spatial (Manchester, and clearly defined as such) as it is temporal (1976 to the 1990s). Unlike these other films, *24 Hour Party People* does not follow any bands on the road but remains rooted in one place, and the unifying feature of the film's narrative is spatial rather than causal or temporal. Thus different sub-genres of the "punk"/"indie" scene in Manchester are to be distinguished by different drugs, clothes, and musical influences, but are united in their spatial *contiguity*: in placing the Happy Mondays in the same spaces as Wilson, Hannett, and New Order this proximity of bands in a single place links them as being Manchester bands and affording them a cultural *continuity* that is otherwise not apparent.

Like Walter Ruttman's *Berlin, Die Symphonie einer Großstadt* (1927) or *Manhattan* (Woody Allen, 1978), *24 Hour Party People* is a film that celebrates its city through music, and Wilson identifies his love of his city as the root of the triumph and failure of the Factory project: "Most of all I love Manchester. The crumbling warehouses, the railway arches, the cheap abundant drugs. That's

what did it in the end. Not the money. Not the drugs. Not even the guns. That is my heroic flaw—