

## NICK REDFERN

### **“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.”<sup>1</sup> 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.”<sup>2</sup> From this perspective, the region is a “state of mind,” an “imagined community,”<sup>3</sup> 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

number of ways: the provision of employment, income growth, the regeneration of the physical environment, and the development of cultural tourism attracting external expenditure. They promote the development of regional institutions to encourage cultural production, distribution, and consumption within a defined territory away from the traditional base of the media industries. Cultural industries also allow regions to modify their image in order to reposition themselves in the “mental maps” of external investors, and to increase the confidence of the regional community and hence its capacity for “endogenous development.”<sup>4</sup>

In this essay I examine the representation of Manchester in *24 Hour Party People* (Michael Winterbottom, 2002) as a cultural region. I argue that in dramatising the emergence and development of the regional music scene in Manchester, from the advent of punk in 1976 to the decline of Madchester and the closure of the Hacienda in the early 1990s, the film appropriates a “punk style” to represent the Manchester music scene. This scene is associated with an ambivalent attitude to Northern identity, with new cultural spaces in the city that develop free of the centralising influences of the London-based music industry, and where the distinction between producers and consumers of cultural products is blurred.

### **From Cottonopolis to Madchester**

In *Manchester, England: The Story of the Pop Cult City*, Dave Haslam traces the shift in the perception of Manchester as a city dominated by the cotton industry —“famed and feared a hundred and fifty years ago as it became the first industrial city in the world”—to a city “known for two things: pop music and

football.”<sup>5</sup> In keeping with theories of postmodernism, it is a shift from a space defined by industrial activity (“Cottonopolis”) to a space defined by cultural activity (“Madchester”) that has made possible the re-imagining of the city in the late twentieth century. A key feature of this shift has been the emergence of a new type of cultural production in the wake of punk, and Haslam notes that “more by accident than design this [cultural] activity has created a tradition, jobs, and a commercial infrastructure; most conspicuously, a small, but powerful, musical infrastructure, more compact, less corporate than London.”<sup>6</sup> This commercial infrastructure, and its impact on cultural production and consumption in the city, has been the subject of research on the part of Manchester Metropolitan University’s Institute for Popular Culture.<sup>7</sup>

Katie Milestone argues that it was the advent of punk in Manchester that was to transform the pop cultural scene in the city, affecting both cultural production in Manchester and the lifestyles and working practices of its inhabitants, as punk renegotiated the power structures of popular culture.<sup>8</sup> This transformation, she argues, is marked by a number of features: a rejection of London’s dominance in the music industry; the renegotiation and exploitation of what it meant to be “Northern” and “Mancunian” in late twentieth-century Britain; the emergence of new cultural networks within Manchester; and the intermeshing of the production and consumption of cultural products.

A key date in the history of popular culture in Manchester is 4 June 1976—on that date the Sex Pistols played their first gig in the city at the Lesser Free Trade Hall, followed a month and a half later by a second performance. At this time the music industry in the United Kingdom was dominated by record companies based in London, and, in the absence of regional music industries, it was to the

capital that bands from all over the country were inexorably drawn. Although Mick Middlemas claims that it was “parochial power that had fuelled the innovatory edges of the music industry since... well, since the Beatles really,”<sup>9</sup> the centripetal forces of London’s cultural industries are memorably represented in Richard Lester’s *A Hard Day’s Night* (1964), in which the Beatles escape from Liverpool by train to the capital in order to appear on television. In rejecting mainstream British society and in openly pouring scorn on the pillars of the music industry (e.g., “God Save the Queen” and “EMI Unlimited” on *Never Mind the Bollocks Here’s the Sex Pistols*), punk inspired those on the margins to remain outside the core of culture and the core of the cultural industries:

Because of the changing structure of the record industry brought about by punk, the regions were no longer entirely dependent on London. Manchester and other provincial cities increasingly began to reject the cultural authority of London as the sole British site of pacesetting cultural innovation. There was a rebellion against mainstream culture as well as a negotiation of the specialisation of this resistance.<sup>10</sup>

The regions, and Manchester in particular, developed their own cultural networks with the creation of independent record labels, fanzines, and venues that deliberately steered clear of the mainstream, and, in doing so, created a powerful voice for those outside London. The emergence of these networks reduced the London-pull on creative talent in the regions, and it became typical for bands to remain in their hometowns and to become closely identified with them (e.g., Joy Division and Manchester, The Specials and Coventry, The Farm and Liverpool).

The development of the cultural industries in Manchester in the aftermath of punk has allowed the city to reconstruct its image. Rob Shields argues that “since

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

A nostalgic discourse of tradition valorises the North as the homeland of a traditional British Working Class and the culture associated with it—ferrets, pigeon racing, mines and mills, fish and chips, regional accents and football—as well as organic communities. It is also the locus for industrial images of the UK: coal-mining, bleak urban landscapes, and windswept countryside (e.g., the Yorkshire Dales)... Its rougher pleasures of the outdoors contrast with the more refined pleasures of the high-culture of London and its commuter belt.<sup>11</sup>

The shift from cotton to culture did not erase the separation between North and South—Haslam claims that the London-based musical press remained indifferent to the emergence of the Manchester scene, while Tony Wilson refers to the UK record industry as “those stupid London bastards.”<sup>12</sup> However, it did allow Manchester to re-create itself as an innovative centre of culture that was modernising and forward-looking rather than provincial: “People involved in the Manchester pop scene took select aspects of what it was supposed to mean to be Northern, provincial, Mancunian, and renegotiated these elements to construct something that was cool, frightening, imposing, and urbane.”<sup>13</sup> The physical landscape of the city was transformed through the regeneration of declining industrial areas as rehearsal spaces, performance spaces and nightclubs (e.g., the Hacienda, Sankey’s Soap), design and retail spaces (e.g., Affleck’s Palace), or as clearly defined cultural areas (e.g., the “Northern Quarter”).

“Northernness” was, in Manchester, not reflected in industrial heritage museums as it was in Saltaire, Beamish, or Armley; rather it was refracted through an avant-gardism to create not a nostalgic view of the North as “working class” but what Milestone identifies as a progressive “working class

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.”<sup>14</sup>

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 managers, promoters, visual designers, fashion designers, DJs, sound technicians, lifestyle journalists, bar and club architects and designers.”<sup>15</sup> As Haslam puts it: “Fans have become bands, consumers have become producers; that’s always the Manchester way.”<sup>16</sup> For Haslam it is this hybridity that gives Manchester its unique cultural status:

What gives further flavour to pop music in Manchester is perhaps because it is a hybrid town, specialising in hybrid music (M-People's mash of house and supper-club soul, Black Grape's mix of street-wise crackery and white indie shuffle, Audioweb's dub and rock collision, the jungle-meets-Joni Mitchell sound of Lamb). Perhaps it's the size; Manchester is too small to be unwieldy and impersonal, but too big to be weedy and insignificant. Perhaps it's to do with the city's entrepreneurial spirit; it's not a question of making things, it's also one of marketing them, selling them. There's an attitude too: defiant, determined, cocky, canny.<sup>17</sup>

Haslam also indicates in this passage that space and scale play a key role in defining Manchester's popular music culture, and Will Straw argues that the unity of alternative rock is not based upon the commonalities of class and other forms of identity, education, or genre, but "has come to be grounded more fundamentally in the way in which such spaces of musical activity have come to establish a distinctive relationship to historical time or geographical location."<sup>18</sup>

### ***24 Hour Party People***

*24 Hour Party People* dramatises the emergence and development of the regional music scene in Manchester discussed above, from the advent of punk in 1976 to the decline of Madchester and the closure of the Hacienda in the early 1990s. It focuses on the career of Tony Wilson, a regional broadcaster, who, as the head of Factory Records, played a key role in this scene, though as a personality in the film "Tony Wilson" claims that he is "a minor character in his own story." This ironic stance is an element of the film's self-conscious postmodernism; and, as a personality, Wilson justifies his artistic and business decision in terms of the "free play of signs and signifiers," and attempts to keep ahead of the intellectual curve by claiming to be postmodern "before it was fashionable" —though it is not clear what this might actually mean. This self-referential postmodernism

shares many features with what Stacy Thompson describes as “punk cinema.” He argues that punk cinema employs an “open, writerly aesthetic; engages with its own history; and critiques its own commodification. It can be negatively defined as non-Hollywoodised, where a Hollywood aesthetic demands a closed, readerly text unconcerned with history and obfuscating its position within the realms of production.”<sup>19</sup> This “punk” aesthetic is evident in *24 Hour Party People* in its open and ambiguous narrative, its appropriation of a DIY aesthetic and documentary form from punk films such as Don Letts’s *Punk Rock Movie* (1978) and Wolfgang Büld’s *Punk in London* (1978), and the film’s awareness of its place in the history of the Manchester scene and its own production.

The narrative of *24 Hour Party People* is candid and equivocal. The film begins with Wilson filming for the ITV regional news programme for the North West *Granada Reports*, a sequence on hang-gliding in the Pennines. Turning to address the camera he informs the audience that this sequence “actually did happen,” and that it is also “symbolic” and “works on two levels.” What this sequence connotes is the myth of Icarus (though Wilson feels compelled to inform us of this), and the plot of the film may thus be taken to be the rise and fall of Factory Records. The film is organised in a three-act structure covering the early years of Factory Records and Joy Division, the Happy Mondays and Madchester, and the collapse of Factory Records. However, the film undercuts this structure to the extent that it does not complete a narrative arc: the film contains no moral, the characters make no emotional journey, and though the film ends, there is no closure for the characters or the spectator.<sup>20</sup> The final sequence of the film finds Wilson, Gretton, Erasmus, and Shaun Ryder atop the Hacienda smoking a joint, and recalls an earlier scene after the Sex Pistols gig



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."<sup>21</sup>

The documentary style of *24 Hour Party People* is brought to the fore in the re-staging of the Sex Pistols gig, at one point revealing an audience member with an 8mm camera on the side of stage, and then cutting to show the Sex Pistols from his point of view. This footage has the DIY qualities of "punk cinema" — the shaky, handheld images are filmed by a fan and not a professional filmmaker, and *24 Four Hour Party People* appropriates this aesthetic for its own style. Robby Muller's cinematography, filmed using digital video cameras, continues to employ this DIY aesthetic throughout the film giving it a realistic and naturalistic feel. The film does not break up sequences through analytical editing but allows the camera to act as a witness to events: long takes and tracking shots occur throughout the film, it makes extensive use of location shooting on the streets of Manchester, and also goes to great lengths accurately to recreate the Factory nights at the Russell Club and (in particular) the Hacienda.

Textually, the film strives to create an impression of "being there," of being part of the Manchester scene, and this documentary feel is reinforced by the use of library footage to give the film a "contextual" realism. One sequence juxtaposes the re-staging of a Joy Division gig that descends into a pitched battle between the band and a group of neo-Nazi skinheads, with Wilson reading the

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 city filmed from a helicopter giving him a God-like point of view.

*24 Hour Party People* demonstrates an awareness of its own role in the construction of a history of the Manchester punk scene. If the film undercuts its mythic status in some respects it reinforces it in others. Wilson pre-emptively informs the audience of events to come. Introducing Howard Devoto at the famed Sex Pistols gig Wilson tells the audience that “Howard will later sleep with my wife.” When we actually come to this sequence later on (after Wilson has been caught by his wife getting a blow-job from a prostitute in the back of a van), we are introduced to the “real” Devoto who claims that he has no recollection of this ever happening. This is reinforced by Wilson’s voiceover with the disclaimer that “He [Devoto] and Lindsey insisted that we make clear that this never happened.” However, the voiceover immediately undercuts this by appealing to John Ford’s *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962) and the argument that “when you have to choose between the truth and the legend, print the legend.” The film is consciously engaged in a process of myth-making that is contrary to the realist documentary style the film appropriates from other punk

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 a vision of himself as God, who confirms his own rightness, laments not signing the Smiths, and recommends that the Duritti Column be given a revival.

The film also refers to its own production: Wilson comments on the narrative structure of the film, quoting F. Scott Fitzgerald as he introduces the second act, and he repeatedly confirms or undermines the historical content of the film. In one scene he identifies the cameos played by "real" people in the film, including Paul Ryder, Mark E. Smith, Clint Boon, and the "real" Tony Wilson, and observes that, although Vini Reilly's appearance has been removed from the final cut, he is sure that it will be reinstated for the film's DVD release. In referring to its own ancillary markets and the possibility of increased album sales on the back of the film, *24 Hour Party People* recognises its own commodification of the Manchester scene; and, as the narrator, Wilson also refers to the commodification of a Mancunian identity: "Manchester became the centre of the universe. The best drugs. The best clothes. The best women. The best bands. The best club. Suddenly everyone wanted to be from Manchester; and if you were a Manc everyone wanted a part of you." The products of the factory scene are themselves represented as commodities, with the tickets, posters, and record covers designed by Peter Saville and delivered so late as to be utterly useless as anything other than souvenirs.

The mixing of documentary footage with the restaging of significant events is one of the ways in which the film elides the distinction between the consumers

and producers of music in Manchester. The film restages the Sex Pistols gig that has become such a legend in the history of Manchester. Though only forty-two people attended this gig, many of those present went on to shape the Manchester music scene. Directly addressing the camera, Wilson identifies the members of the audience who go on to have successful music careers (Pete Shelley and Howard Devoto, Stiff Kittens, Mick Hucknall), accompanying each with footage of the “real” acts (the Buzzcocks, New Order, Simply Red) in concert. The film places documentary footage of the Sex Pistols with the recreated audience within the same frame. At the end of this sequence John the Postman, a notorious figure in the Manchester punk scene, climbs out of the audience onto the stage and grabbing the microphone launches into an impromptu version of “Louie Louie,” breaking the separation of performance space and audience space. This is repeated in the story of the Happy Mondays, who are first introduced to us watching *So It Goes* and Northern pop singer Karl Denver at home. We then see concert footage of the Happy Mondays playing live with Denver. Later in the film the boundary between the band and the audience is again blurred when Shaun Ryder invites Bez onto the stage from the audience: the crowd at the Hacienda is unmoved by the Mondays’ indie-funk and Wilson points out that “no-one is dancing,” only for the crowd to erupt in delight once Bez climbs out of the audience and begins to perform his now famous dance on the stage. Musical spaces in the city are thus represented as being whole rather than divided into performance space and audience space.

The emergence of a regional music in Manchester in the late 1970s and 1980s is tied to the development of new cultural spaces in the city. This is clearly articulated with reference to the Hacienda, when Wilson states, “Buildings create

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 way people think; that's how it happened in renaissance Florence." These spaces are themselves cultural products given catalogue numbers alongside the recordings of Joy Division, A Certain Ratio, and New Order: the Factory nights at the Russell Club are given the number FAC 1, and FAC 51 is the Hacienda. The city itself takes on a significant role in the shaping of the music the film represents: placing Steven Morris on the roof of the recording studio, Martin Hannett turns the whole city into a recording studio; and in repeating Factory's trick (from the company's 1990 Christmas card) of substituting the word 'Madchester' on signs around the city, the real and the imaginary Manchester's merge. The city and its music thus shape each other.

The Factory nights at the Russell Club in Hulme take their name from Erasmus's suggestion to "reverse the trend" of an era of industrial decline and to put up a sign stating "Factory opening." Wilson and his wife describe this as being "a bit Andy Warhol" and "a bit L. S. Lowry." The use of these labels also highlights the shift from industry to culture in the city and identifies this location as the focus for the "working class bohemia" Milestone attributes to the Manchester scene. Removed from the centre of the city, the club is located among the high-rise tower blocks of Hulme and run by local "gangster" Don Tonay. The film highlights the incongruity of Wilson's presence in this area by contrasting "the Don" with Wilson, who claims that he was going to be a don at Cambridge. In bringing the Durutti Column to Hulme, Wilson places the avant-garde in the midst of working class culture. This hybridity is again evident when Wilson visits the Russell Club at the end of the film and is serenaded with an *a*

*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

subtext of Winterbottom's film,"<sup>22</sup> and the capital is associated with an artistic conservatism and political Conservatism that Manchester subverts. As Wilson states, "In 1976 two or three people controlled all the music on television, and they didn't like punk. So, for a year, if you wanted to see the most exciting bands in the world, they were on a regional show coming out of Manchester—my show." His show on Granada television, *So It Goes*, lies beyond the reach of the London-based media and serves as an outlet not only for the Manchester scene but also for punk throughout the UK. This sequence again combines the restaging of history (i.e., Wilson presenting *So It Goes*, characters attending gigs) with documentary footage of various punk acts (e.g., Souixsie and the Banshees, the Jam, the Stranglers—significantly all London bands). It is in his role as a TV presenter that Wilson announces the factory nights at the Russell Club (and later the death of Ian Curtis), utilising the regional media to promote a regional music scene. Also included in this sequence is Iggy Pop performing "The Passenger," which describes travelling through an urban environment ("I see the bright and hollow sky/over the city's ripped backsides/and everything looks good tonight"), prefiguring the pleasure the film takes in representing Manchester. *24 Hour Party People* is a nostalgic tour through the "ripped backsides" of Hulme, Little Hulton, and Castlefield, and the film celebrates the marginal status of these places beyond London, but also beyond the official discourses of nostalgia and heritage in the North (discussed below).

*24 Hour Party People* ends on a final ignominy: the sale of Factory to a major label, London Records. Gretton confronts Wilson over the sale. Wilson asks him, "What's wrong with London Records?" Gretton responds: "Well, the name, for a start." Wilson makes an effort to impress the executives from London Records

with “sophisticated food” (i.e., stuffed vine leaves): for the Londoners that is out of keeping with the Manchester scene. Shaun Ryder asks with innocence, wonder, and contempt, “Is that what they eat then down there?” and dismisses this spread as “fucking bunny rabbit food,” while Gretton describes it as “Southern food for Southern cunts.” Roger Ames expresses his admiration for the £30,000 table (“What a table!”) that symbolises the betrayal of Factory’s “experiment in human nature” and its aping of the southern record labels (with offices, tables, and meetings), suggesting that such material concerns are the norm for the major labels in the “sophisticated” south. However, Wilson is saved from committing the greatest crime against punk: by virtue of the fact that Factory does not own the rights to any of its own back catalogue the label cannot “sell out” —either “literally or metaphorically” —its ideals. In this way the Manchester punk ethos remains intact, as a London-based record company can never own it.

The film imagines any journey beyond the confines of the Greater Manchester music scene as a nightmare. This is most memorably represented in Wilson’s journey to what Gretton describes with barely concealed contempt as “glamorous fucking London” in order to interview the Conservative member of parliament, Sir Keith Joseph. His journey is horrific: the snow on the Pennines halts his progress, as though the gods were trying to stop him from going to London, but he presses on and finds himself on a train. Here the film mocks the Intercity advertisements of the 1980s with its use of saturated colour to represent a drug-fuelled trip, and portrays Wilson’s fellow passengers as demonic. As a Mancunian punk, Wilson is constitutionally incapable showing the appropriate degree of deference to his subject, and before the interview has even begun he



insults Joseph, calling him “the Mad Monk” and a “mad bastard.” Ian Curtis’s suicide comes after Joy Division are told they are to tour America, and we see him hanging in his front room while Werner Herzog’s film about the failure of the American dream, *Stroszek* (1977), plays in the background. The Happy Mondays do find a way to tour by turning their tour bus into a mobile Manchester where the fun never stops, but ultimately leaving the city is fatal, as those who go out into the world find out. Both the Happy Mondays and New Order go abroad to record their new albums (to Barbados and Ibiza respectively), and their failure to produce is a contributing factor in the demise of Factory Records, as the Manchester scene becomes separated from the spaces that had earlier sustained it.

*24 Hour Party People* is both mocking and proud of its “Northernness.” Wilson describes himself as a “serious fucking journalist” living in “one of the most important times in human history,” and despairs of the inane human-interest stories he is sent to report on by Granada. He finds himself leaping off the Pennines attached to a hang-glider with little instruction, interviewing a dwarf bathing an elephant at Chester Zoo, and reporting on a duck that thinks it is a sheep dog. These sequences are used to reinforce the stereotype of backward, Northern provincialism that Wilson strives to overcome, and he angrily rejects the suggestions of his producer to do a feature on the “North West’s tallest man.” The ignorance of provincial journalism is also represented in Ryan, a local reporter, who confuses Brian Epstein and George Martin, and who repeatedly puts down the idea of a Manchester scene. This inane provincialism is associated with official discourses of heritage in the North when Wilson interviews a former canal worker, who tells us that he can remember “very little” of his time on the

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 Ruttmann'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—my excess of civic pride.”

### Notes

1. Michael Keating, *The New Regionalism in Western Europe: Territorial Restructuring and Political Change* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 1998), 153.
2. Anne Gilbert, “The New Regional Geography in English and French Speaking Countries” (*Progress in Human Geography* 12, 1988), 210.
3. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 1991).
4. See Alan Williams, Gareth Shore and Martin Huber, “The Arts and Economic Development: Regional and Urban-Rural Contrasts in UK Local Authority Policies for the Arts” (*Regional Studies* 29.1, 1995), 73-80.
5. Dave Haslam, *Manchester, England: The Story of a Pop Cult City* (London: Fourth Estate, 1999), x, xxv.
6. *Ibid.*, 260.
7. See Centre for Employment Research, *The Culture Industry: The Economic Importance of the Arts in Greater Manchester* (Manchester: Manchester Polytechnic, 1989); Derek Wynne ed., *The Culture Industry: The Arts and Urban Regeneration* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1992); and Justin O’Connor and Derek Wynne, eds., *From the Margins to the Centre: Cultural Production and Consumption in the Post-industrial City* (Aldershot: Arena, 1996).
8. Katie Milestone, “Regional Variations: Northernness and New Urban Economies of Hedonism,” in Justin O’Connor and Derek Wynne, eds., *From the Margins to the Centre*, 91-115.
9. Mick Middles, *From Joy Division to New Order: The True Story of Anthony H. Wilson and Factory Records* (London: Virgin, 2002), 262.
10. Milestone, 99.

11. Rob Shields, *Places on the Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 1991), 229.
12. Middles, 226-228, 264.
13. Milestone, 101.
14. Haslam, 199.
15. Milestone, 105.
16. Haslam, 134.
17. Ibid., xxvii.
18. Will Straw, "Systems of Articulation, Logics of Change: Communities and Scenes in Popular Music" (*Cultural Studies* 5.3, 1991), 375.
19. Stacy Thompson, "Punk Cinema" (*Cinema Journal* 43.2, 2004), 64. Thompson's use of the term "punk" to identify a class of films reflects *24 Hour Party People*'s use of "punk" as an ill-defined concept that is, in general, opposed to the status quo, but which is not sufficiently distinguished from "indie," in the context of either the cinema or popular music.
20. The open and ambiguous nature of *24 Hour Party People* stands in stark contrast to *Almost Famous*, which is a "closed, readerly text" distributed by Columbia-Tristar, with its neat ending that re-unites a broken family, bringing together the rock star with his adoring fan, and sees the fulfilment of all the characters' dreams.
21. Since the closure of Factory Too in 1997, Wilson has relaunched his record company on two further occasions, as Factory Records Limited, and as F4.
22. Matthew Higgs, "Rants and Raves" (*Artforum International* 40.10, 2002), 38.