

# The hacienda in the film 24 hour party people



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Manchester is a city renowned for its popularity with the younger generation. The city is not only known for its youthful image, but for its industrial style buildings in the form of terraced houses and the factories which are spread around Manchester. Through Factory and the Hacienda these two aspects of Manchester culture were merged to dramatic effect and this was the focal point of Michael Winterbottom's Twenty-Four Hour Party People.

The film follows Tony Wilson the founder of Factory Records and the Hacienda and traces the effect the music scene had on the city of Manchester and the people of Manchester. In my essay I will analyse the strengths and weaknesses of the film's portrayal and representation of Manchester and its public. ' Films are produced and seen within a social, cultural context that includes more than other film texts. Film serves a cultural function through its narratives that goes beyond the pleasure of the story<sup>1</sup>' The film 24 Hour Party People would have been produced primarily to entertain the audience but is obviously important to the people involved to educate the viewer on Manchester and its music scene. It is important to remember this is in fact a film and not a documentary as much of its presentation would suggest.

I feel this is a strength of the film as Tony Wilson proves an excellent perspective, although if the audience were to trust in all that is presented it could prove a weakness. The Manchester music scene has always been a large element of the city itself. Back in the 1980's the Manchester ' scene' seemingly set standards for bands around the U. K .

The likes of 'Joy Division' and The Charlatans all originated from this one city. Incidentally the majority of these bands were signed to Factory Records. Peter Kane commented in Q Magazine that 'All the best bands come from Manchester - Inspiral Carpets, Happy Mondays, James, The Smiths, New Order.' This bold statement suggests that part of the Manchester experience would have the notoriousness of the music and its culture within this period. The most influential catalysts to the era were indeed Factory Records and The Hacienda.

'Music can provide powerful emotional accompaniment to a film's high points. Most importantly, if most obviously, it enhances realism by reproducing the sounds one would normally associate with the actions and events depicted visually.' In the film all of the music is from the Manchester music scene at the time, this is an obvious strength of the production as it is the whole subject of the film. It provides substance to what is being spoke about, evoking a greater sense of the era and providing a chance to reminisce for those who lived through it.

The two most famous bands of Factory were The Stone Roses and The Happy Mondays. The Happy Mondays formed in 1984 in Salford, Manchester. The very nature of the band itself became very well known and its members were known for there excessive drug taking and off-the-wall behaviour. There first gig in Tony Wilson's notorious music venue and nightclub, The Hacienda, was during the year that they were formed, this is when the true identity of the band was created. Mark 'Bez' Berry, a close friend of the band jumped onto the stage and danced madly in order to encourage the crowd to get more involved.

He never left the stage without them and the band as a whole was born. Due to the mass population at Manchester, and the large demands by unsigned bands to be noticed, it was obvious that every band needed a certain something about them, an element that made them stand out. Shaun Ryder front man of The Happy Mondays claimed that Bez was their essence. ' Bez was brought on because he was a character and to do the image thing. To help us get recognised. ' He was unforgettable from his first dance onstage and became the trademark of the band, the label and the venue.

The impact of Factory on Manchester and the infamous music scene surrounding the city erupted, and a new genre came about which defined the music for years. The era was named and is still known as ' Madchester'. The basic idea was established was of the music itself and the mad reception from the fans in Manchester. It was a time when Manchester and music seemed at its biggest and best, it was the only ' place to be'. The Stone Roses front man Ian Brown distanced the band from the ' Madchester' tag ' People had preconceived ideas that we were hooligans, so they blanked us. ' The preconception did not last long and before long they had overtaken The Mondays as the jewel in the Factory Records crown.

The Stone Roses were not interested in being a part of ' Madchester', If it was a scene then the Stone Roses were resolutely, not part of it, in fact it was stated that the band seemed so ' un-Manchester' Manchester had been transformed into a well respected, trendy and happening city and at the heart of it all was Factory Records and the Hacienda. In Michael Winterbottom's film ' Twenty-Four Hour Party People' the cities transition is documented. The film as a whole shows the decline of Manchester as an

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industrial city, the ending of the city being seen purely as an industrial city, the ending of the city being seen purely as an industry producer and the evolution of the music culture, 'Madchester'. In the film Tony Wilson takes notice of the change in the city and acknowledges the industrial side to the city 'Manchester.

.. birthplace to the railways, the computer, the bouncing bomb... He then goes on to discuss how the once urban industrial lifestyle has become 'the dance age' and 'the birth of rave culture'.

Tony Wilson presents this new age to the audience by directly addressing the camera 'Welcome to Manchester'. As Graeme Turner commented 'The positioning of the camera is possibly the most apparent of the practices and technologies which contribute to the most apparent of the practices and technologies which contribute to the making of a film<sup>4</sup>. 'The presentation of Wilson speaking directly to the camera reinforces his role as the storyteller and is used frequently throughout the film. I feel the inclusions of such scenes prove to be a great strength of its production and although they detract from the realism they definitely help move the plot along and create intimacy between Wilson and the audience.

Throughout the film representations of the myth of Icarus are employed to represent the times and events within Manchester and Wilson himself. Steve Coogan who plays Tony Wilson states how similar his life and works are to the legend. This ideology is developed further into the film. The prospects and potential of both bands involved, in this case New Order and The Happy

Mondays, and The Hacienda compared to the decline at the culmination, the closure of the club.

His aspirations and far-fetched ambitions result in disaster, in turn similar to burning his wings. The opening scene holds significant meaning and reinforces the idea of crashing and burning. The shot of hand-gliding represents the heights of which both Factory Records and The Hacienda reach, but ultimately, like both of these, Tony Wilson ends up crashing the hand -glider several times. The importance and consequences of the scene are symbolic and represent the film as a whole. This is not apparent until the end of the film, unless the audience are previously aware of the Factory story.

The representations of Manchester are greatly influenced by the myths created for the city. This is strongly illustrated in the film as Tony Wilson admits that he prefers myth to the real event. ' I agree with John Ford, when you have to choose between the truth and the legend, print the legend'. One prominent feature of Twenty-Four Hour Party People's portrayal of Manchester is that it shows the rougher less desirable aspects of the city, despite its increasingly popular reputation at the time. ' When the camera moves to a close-up, this indicates strong emotion or crisis. ' The graffiti on the walls surrounding this respected status is zoomed on and held on by the camera: this offers a sense of urban decay to the audience as well as an honest and fair depiction of the city.

Through the use of actual real-life footage juxtaposed with the film itself a greater sense of authenticity is created. For example, the live shots of The

Sex Pistols gig in Manchester are used during Tony Wilson's narration of the concert. This method of shots, flicking from actual real footage to the scripted scenes is employed throughout the film. The film also incorporates hand-held style camera-work in order to evoke a live feel and again increase the realism. Despite the film claiming authenticity it also reveals to the viewer its own constructiveness. An unknown film reviewer reinforces this idea by observing that ' various elements are made up or ' glorified' for film .

.. ts hard to determine what's true and what isn't5'. This also demonstrates the films self-referential side, additional elements are added to make it more cinema-worthy, this could be deemed a strength or a weakness depending on the motivations of the viewer.

In order to convey the differing aspects of Manchester the film presents us with the juxtaposition of Tony Wilson Granada newsreader with his role at Factory records and within The Hacienda rave phenomenon. This accentuates that despite his bizarre life within the success of the city, the record label and the club, normal everyday life still existed. Manchester as a city is also represented through the very name of Tony Wilson's record label, Factory Records, itself, according to Alan Erasmus, Tony Wilson's partner in the record company, the actual name of the business came about when he was driving down the road and noticed a sign that stood out saying ' Factory For Sale'. Erasmus comments that he automatically thought ' Factory that's the name because a factory was where people work and create things, and I thought to myself, these are workers who are also musicians and they'll be creative. As well as the connotations of the amount of hard work done in a factory, the hope that it will also result in increased creativity is evident too.

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The impact of the name also follows the traditions of Manchester and the images of old, industrial buildings.

In Manchester during the 1980's the extensive music industry became an almost revolutionary occurrence. The music scene of Manchester amplified and it seemed that more and more people wanted to be associated with the industry. A new generation was born and the 'look' was created. The bands of factory fashioned this unique look that suited the style of the music, as well as the members of the band. 'The fashion, the look, the excitement, the good feeling.

.. came from the falling apart housing estates around the city. 'The 'look' consisted mainly of baggy trousers, usually t-shirts, long or short sleeved, trainers and a specific bowl-shaped haircut. Consequently it was named the 'baggy look' and is employed with subtlety in the film. So dress can be a language; by changing our fashions (selecting and combining our garments and thus the meanings that culture attributes to them) we can change what our clothes "say" about us and our place within the culture.

6' Winterbottom understands this and includes characters with the 'baggy look' increasingly as the film progresses symbolising the growing popularity of the music and the lifestyle in Manchester. In conclusion I believe the film's representation of Manchester to be a complete success the production is perfectly suited to the subject matter, the Manchester music scene. Although some dramatisation is evident in order to attract those not automatically drawn by the setting I found the film completely absorbing and realistic. The script combined with suitable camera techniques, lighting, costume and



music have produced a film which greatest weakness occurs only if audience is confused and takes it for a documentary. Although not around to remember the ' scene' I feel the portrayal of Manchester is an honest and accurate one achieved essential by the employment of Manchester actors who have the city and the music in there blood.