

A Nostalgic Punk Song of Past Manchester

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Spotlighting the ups and downs of rock music in Manchester from the 1970s to the 1990s, *24 Hour Party People* (2002) recounts the history of the transformation of a punk city by deconstructing the narrative of a traditional industrial city from the fabricated protagonist Tony Wilson's point of view. Remarkably, this experimental film is filled with entertaining, absurd, melancholic, psychedelic and frenetic musical spaces in combination with the cultural nostalgia for the industrial decline of post-war Britain. At the same time, through the use of pseudo-documentary and kaleidoscope-like photography, the film distorts the boundaries between reality and fiction and blurs the boundaries between history and fantasy in a unique post-modern artistic expression. In its modern, open-ended aesthetic, the filmic narrative overlaps the cityscape of Manchester during the industrial transition from a cotton textile-based city to a space defined by cultural activities with documentary footage of punk music and performances, emotionally exalting the spirit of the carnivalesque, emancipatory punk that once existed, and providing a three-dimensional, imaginative space for the audience to look back into the everlasting past.

In the opening sequence of the film, the character Wilson soars through the skies of Manchester in a paraglider, transporting the audience to the Manchester rock and roll era of the last century amidst a blend of real newsreel footage and fictional characters. In Wilson's Manchester television programme, he attends a concert performance by the Sex Pistols. As Wilson says in the film, the Sex Pistols broke the boundaries of traditional rock music, "ahead of everyone in Manchester", conveying the experimental, pioneering elements that changed rock music. Subsequently, accompanied by Wilson's voice-over and narration from a God's perspective, the audience wonderingly finds themselves in the juxtaposition of documentary-realist representations of footage of numerous rock bands' performances and fictionalized memories of episodes from beyond time and space. For example, in the first half of the narrative, Wilson introduces Sex Pistols member Howard Devoto by saying, "Howard will later sleep with my wife." This statement is later confirmed by the imagined scenario of Wilson's wife and Howard having sex on the toilet. But then the camera pans out and the real Howard himself claims that he fails to recollect this memory. From this point of view, the film greatly teases the grand historical narrative through the use of character voice-overs, hand-panned shots, and prophetic perspectives, and to some extent implies a punk and postmodern style of deconstructionism.

On the other hand, the film also conveys an ambivalent reflection on the radical changes in the city of Manchester, as evidenced by the self-professed experience of the protagonist Wilson who imitates the real "Mr Manchester" and his historical assessment of Manchester. As a graduate of Cambridge University and a member of the cultural elite, Wilson embraces the aspirations of being a "serious fucking journalist" and seeks to cover "one of the most important times in human history". But in his everyday reporting, he is often forced to serve up interviews about trivialities, such as the dwarf bathing an elephant in a zoo and the duck playing the role of a sheepdog. In a way, this boredom and banalization also indicates the consequences of the commodification of Manchester at that time in the transition of urbanization. As Wilson states in the film, with music, dance, drugs and the venue, the city forms into the Renaissance Florence-like Manchester which "became the centre of the universe. The best drugs, the best clothes, the best women, the best bands, the best clubs." In the zeitgeist of universal pursuit and revelry, Winterbottom's jumping shots of decaying factories and falling pigeons suggest a sense of nostalgia for the fading traditions of the greatest industrial city in history. This wariness of fading traditions can be underscored by the comments of Peter, a canal worker interviewed by Wilson, who claims that he obtains very

little memories of the days on the canals. But as Wilson says in the later narration, with a pioneering cultural spirit, Manchester City will grow old but will not die, and the Manchester punk rock spirit will be passed on from generation to generation, renewing the perception of the city's history and culture in nostalgia and imagination.