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Factory records and the situationist influence on urban space

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Abstract

There has been a substantial amount of literature on Factory Records and Manchester, with some exploring the urban influence on music and its associated local identities. Writing on post-punk has also considered regional and local influences. This article proposes a new approach with a detailed consideration of the Situationist influence and wider European radical theory on Factory Records. In particular it shows that this influence enabled Factory to create new ways of shaping and interacting with urban space. The investigation incorporates a historical discourse of Factory and the role Situationist theory played in the music, design, artwork and creation of spaces. The investigation is supported by the integration of urban theory and geographical theory. Like other punk and post-punk independent labels, Factory had European connections. For Factory though, the article explains, it is the combination of these links with the incorporation of a European radical tradition, in particular the use of the Situationist approach to the urban environment, that makes it distinctive. By incorporating this wider European influence on the development of punk and post-punk it is possible to highlight previously unacknowledged aspects of post-punk's regional voice and connections to a wider sense of European identity.

Keywords

Situationist; Europe; Factory Records; Urban Theory; Manchester; Region

Introduction

The majority of studies on the connections between Anglo-American and (continental) European popular music focus on the influence of the former on the latter. Such an approach

reflects the dominant thinking of popular music as that in which Anglo-American music constitutes the centre and European music the periphery (on this model see Frith 1991). It is not my intention here to dismiss this narrative, but I want to complicate it by considering a movement in a different direction: the influence of European culture on the music produced in England. My case study is the history of Manchester-based Factory Records, which was active from 1978 until 1992. I am particularly interested in the influence of the ideas of Situationist International and European high art on the music produced in Factory Records, the graphic art of its records, the promotion of artists, and the ideology of Factory, embodied by its founder and manager Tony Wilson. My argument is that the special significance attached by Wilson and his collaborators to Europe was a tool in a more local power game – namely, a struggle of northern English music with the centre, represented by London. The European-ness of Factory was meant to furnish the project with a distinct identity.

To examine this European-ness that was shaped and reflected in Factory Records I ask the question: what is the significance of European radical traditions on the Factory project? I will pay particular concern to the role European radical theory had on Factory's approach to the urban space of Manchester, as well as any associated regional effect, which enabled Factory to distinguish itself from a London-centric British music culture. There is consideration of the work of key Situationists including Guy Debord and Raoul Vaneigem as well as the incorporation of key literature on post-punk Manchester (Robb 2010; Savage 2005; Reynolds 2006). Included in the analysis is the substantial amount of material that has been written on Factory (Haslam 2000; Morley 2007; Nice 2007). With its concern for the urban space the conceptual framework makes particular reference to Henri Lefebvre, and follows the approach of a number of geographical theorists who have examined the relationship of music and sound to the urban environment (Connell and Gibson 2002; Smith 1994; Ingham et al. 1999; Revill 2015). Connell and Gibson argue that a musical identity can configure a reaction

to 'mainstream' cultural practices (2002: 15). This reaction can assert a new style, which is 'an effective form of resistance to the homogenising forces of the culture industry.... by enabling people to experience music in distinctive localised ways' (Smith 1994: 237).

In my discussion of European influences I will utilize a substantial amount of written material about Factory records, both academic and journalistic, including first-hand accounts written by people close to Factory Records, including Tony Wilson himself (Wilson 2002; Curtis 2005; Hook 2013, 2014; Sumner 2014). I will also draw on the film *24 Hour Party People* (Winterbottom, 2002) , which, despite its own undermining of its value as a historical document, captures well both the European-ness of Factory and Wilson's regionalist and anti-London stance. Another film, *B-Movie: Lust & Sound in West-Berlin 1979–1989* (Hoppe and Lange, 2015), highlights the strong sub- and pop-culture links between Manchester and other European cities such as Berlin. The film is a fast-paced assortment of mostly unreleased film and TV footage from the late 1970s and 1980s. The film starts with the advent of punk and ends with the Techno Love Parade and is based on Mark Reeder's experience living in Berlin. Reeder formed the Manchester punk band The Frantic Elevators together with Mick Hucknall before moving to Berlin. In 1978, Reeder decided to leave Britain and move to Berlin. While living in Berlin he became Factory Records' German representative, promoting the label's bands, Joy Division and ACR. Reeder also sound-engineered and managed a number of Berlin punk and post-punk groups. Such European links can be seen alongside other punk and post-punk contacts that existed in Europe at the time. The Belgian, Netherlands, France, Germany and Scandinavia punk and post-punk scenes (and anarchist traditions) created musical connections that transcended the national boundaries of Europe. The Situationist International played a major role in the history of Factory Records, as reflected in the fact that Factory sponsored the ICA's Situationist International exhibition catalogue in 1989 and hosted the 1996 Situationist International conference at the Hacienda

(Factory's nightclub). Such an engagement in high art and intellectual endeavour was an unusual departure for a record company and commercial music club, signalling that Factory was not primarily interested in making money but rather in conducting politics through art and adding an aesthetic dimension to politics. It can be argued that such concerns were also at the centre of the Situationist International project. To demonstrate it, let us present briefly the history and programme of this movement.

The Situationist International was active from 1957 to 1972. It was a post-Marxist organization, or rather movement (as it had a rather loose structure), that utilized many original ideas of Marx, yet attempted to adjust them to the new times. From Marx, Situationists took the concept of alienation and the fetishism of commodities. They agreed with Marx that the production of commodities for profit is the main goal of a capitalist system, and this leads to alienation. However, unlike Marx, who in his writing privileged production as the main source of alienation, Situationists focused on consumption. For them, consumption was as alienating as production, largely due to being re-presented, hence mediated. Guy Debord, one of the leaders of this movement and the author of the celebrated *The Society of the Spectacle*, argues that the history of social life can be understood as 'the decline of being into having, and having into merely appearing' ([1967] 1994: 17). For Debord the symbol of the new type of alienation was the 'spectacle', which should be understood not only literally, but symbolically, as a stage of human development when relations between commodities have supplanted relations between people, in which the spectacle replaces genuine life and activity. It should be mentioned that the focus on consumption, characteristic for Debord, reflects the period of (relative) prosperity, when their theories were created. Speaking figuratively, the Situationists were not only children of Marx but also of Coca Cola.

The Situationists attempted to counteract this alienation not by ordinary political action, which they saw as reified and equally dominated by spectacle, but by advocating a return to more authentic forms of life, which would not be mediated by objects. Raoul Vaneigem, another important member of the movement, claimed that ‘anyone who talks about revolution and class struggle without referring explicitly to everyday life – without grasping what is subversive about love and positive in the refusal of constraints – has a corpse in their mouth’ (Vaneigem [1967] 1983: 38). Creating ‘situations’ was the privileged tool of achieving their goal of fighting alienation and spectacle. The Situationists could never quite agree on the precise nature of a situation, but one can argue that this was their very point: situations were meant to be created in a free, individual way, rather than follow a specific model, as was the case with ‘spectacles’, which conformed to pre-existing conventions. They argued that any existing texts, slogans and artworks can be used to construct a new situation. The privileged way to use them was through a process the Situationists termed *détournement* (Debord [1957] 2006: 3), which consisted of turning capitalist slogans and logos against the advertisers. In a wider sense, *détournement* was meant to turn the capitalist system against itself.

‘Situationism’ is a problematic term, since the Situationist International firmly rejected the notion of an ‘ism’. Sadie Plant (1992) points out that the Situationist ‘demands practical realisation, and is a theory which was only made possible by the acts of rebellion, subversion, and negation’; it is not an ideology but a call for practical action.

One can see that there is a particular fit between the Situationists and punk (Frith and Horne 1987: 123–61). Unlike rock, in which virtuosity and following conventions are most valued, punk cherishes spontaneity, breaking conventions and even amateurishness. It is more acceptable for the audience of punk bands to climb the stage than to do the same at rock concerts. Punk was also seen by some critics as being close to anarchism and Marxism. It is worth mentioning here that Malcolm McLaren, the Sex Pistols manager, was in fact a

committed Situationist, who had immersed himself in the writings of Debord and Vaneigem and loitered on the fringes of King Mob, a British Situationist International splinter group. There is a range of opinion, however, on how significant the influence of Situationist ideas was on punk. For Marcus there is a very substantial and direct link between The Situationist International and Punk, where he states

a single, serpentine fact: late in 1976 a record called 'Anarchy in the U.K.' was issued... made by a four-man rock 'n' roll band called the Sex Pistols, and written by singer Johnny Rotten, the song distilled, in crudely poetic form, a critique of modern society once set out by a small group of Paris-based intellectuals. (1989)

For others such as Savage (2005) and Coon (1982) there is a strong influence of Situationist ideas on Punk. For Stewart Home in *Cranked Up Really High* (1995) there is a direct rebuttal of the Situationist link to punk, where he says '...there are no direct links between PUNK ROCK, the Sex Pistols and the Situationist International' and '...many of the wilder aspects of sixties and seventies "counter-culture" have been wrenched out of context and labelled as Situationist when they actually have nothing to do with the term'. Wilson and Factory's approach, understanding and interpretation of the Situationist's ideas may not have been fully correct. However, on a number of occasions they attribute their actions to the ideas. They were certainly engaged with SI ideas on the urban environment and the need for transformative actions within everyday space.

Not surprisingly, one of the key events that led to the creation of Factory Records and its Situationist-inspired ideology was the Sex Pistol gig at the Manchester Free Trade Hall on 4 June 1976, which is also presented in *24 Hour Party People* as a crucial event in Factory's history. This event may itself be considered a situation, because it challenged the notion of

pop star. Bernard Sumner, who later went on to form Joy Division with Peter Hook, said that he felt that the Sex Pistols 'destroyed the myth of being a pop star, of a musician being some kind of god that you had to worship' (quoted in Maconie 2014: 299). This is because it showed that anyone could play an instrument in a band; for that one did not need to 'be a super talented classically trained musician such as Rick Wakeman'. Consequently, the performance produced a 'situationist' response among the members of the audience, who started to believe that they too could be in a band, make music and change their everyday routines, from a dead-end job to being in a punk rock band. Although Winterbottom's film shows there were only forty two people in the audience, many of this group in due course became important characters in the Factory story, including the members of Joy Division, record producer Martin Hannett, actor and one of the founders of Factory Records, Alan Erasmus, Joy Division manager Rob Gretton, and TV presenter and the founder of Factory Records, Tony Wilson. Of course, it can be argued that these people were already working towards their artistic goals before the gig. However, it certainly did speed up what happened next, as argued by David Nolan;

It's one of those moments in popular culture whereby you can put your finger on it and say: that was it, that was the day, that was the time, that was the year that was the precise moment when everything took a left turn.... the Sex Pistols' performance has been named by critics as one of the most pivotal performances in music history.... because of the effect the music had on the audience. (Nolan 2006)

Although the Free Trade Hall gig played an important role in the creation of Factory Records, it should be pointed out that the key individual behind Factory Records, Tony Wilson (1950–2007), who was also a journalist for Granada Television and the BBC, was well aware of

Situationist ideas prior to the Sex Pistols' gig. This influence stems from him having met Situationist International member Christopher Gray when he was at Cambridge University. Wilson once told *The Sunday Times* newspaper that the philosophy he developed when he was an undergraduate was Situationism and acid (University of Cambridge 2007). Wilson is also quoted as saying:

I was at Cambridge with other would-be Situationists like Paul Sieveking and I was a member of the Kim Philby Dining Club which I think had some people from the Angry Brigade involved. We all wanted to destroy the system but didn't know how. We knew about Strasbourg and the Situationist tactics of creative plagiarism and basing change on desire. The Situationists offered, I thought then and I still think now, the only future revolution I could imagine or want. (quoted in Andrew Hussey 2001: 214)

The 'Strasbourg event' that Wilson refers to was actually used in the naming of the Durutti Column, one of the bands on Factory Records. The band was named after an event at Strasbourg University in 1966, where student revolutionaries, influenced by anarchist and Situationist writings took over the students' union. They were able to do this because no one opposed them in the election. They then proceeded to spend the entire annual funding of the student union on creating a massive comic strip that they flyposted overnight throughout the city, which resulted in the city being brought to a halt in the morning rush hour. One of the comic strip panels featured two cowboys talking about reification. This panel was called 'The Return of the Durutti Column': the Durruti Column being the largest anarchist column military unit formed during the Spanish Civil War. They thus became the symbol of the Spanish anarchist movement and its struggle to create an egalitarian society. Tony Wilson

suggested that the name Durutti Column should be given to Vini Reilly's band on the Factory label. Vini Reilly also went on to use the Situationist terminology of 'Exclusions' for ex-band members and 'Includes' for current band members on their first Factory record entitled the *Factory Sampler*. They also used the 'Two Cowboys' graphic as part of the cover art. The Durutti Column later used a sandpaper album sleeve for one of their albums. This was inspired by Asger Jorn and Guy Debord's book *Mémoires* (1959), which was also conceived with a sandpaper sleeve, although in reality it never happened. The Durutti Column was not the only name connected to Factory that was inspired by Situationism. Another example is the name of Tony Wilson's management alter-ego, which was called Movement of the 24th January. This was a reference to the French student uprisings of 1968, with 24th January being the start of the uprisings at Nanterre in the western suburbs of Paris.

Factory also utilized the Situationist tactic of sparking controversy, in the vein of punk excesses, as previously mentioned. Joy Division, originally called Warsaw, needed to change their name to stop confusion with Warsaw Pakt, another punk band. The name Joy Division was controversial because it was taken from the prostitution wing of a Nazi concentration camp in the 1955 novel *House of Dolls* (Ka-Tzetnik 135633). Joy Division made their recorded debut in June 1978 when the band self-released *An Ideal for Living*. The packaging of this record featured a drawing of a Hitler Youth member on the cover. This coupled with the band's name fuelled speculation about their sympathy to fascism, partly confirmed by Hook and Sumner later admitting to being intrigued by fascism. Stephen Morris, Joy Division's drummer, insisted that the group's obsession with Nazi imagery came from a desire to keep memories of the sacrifices of their parents and grandparents during World War II alive. He argued that accusations of neo-Nazi sympathies merely provoked the band 'to keep on doing it, because that's the kind of people we are' (Reynolds 2006: 111). This can be seen to be within the spirit of Situationism, with its aim of provoking a strong reaction.

For Howard Slater the most explicit references to the Situationist International made anywhere on Factory Records is the three tracks that the Liverpoolian band Royal Family & The Poor recorded for the *Factory Quartet* compilation: *Vaneigem Mix*, *Death Factory* and *Rockets*. With *Vaneigem Mix* the listener is confronted with a track where the vocalist presents a montage of paragraphs from Raoul Vaneigem's *Revolution of Everyday Life* ([1967] 1983). Slater explains that the last track, *Rockets*, 'contains many lines that undermine the certainties of a prevailing left-consensus and, in criticising all that was and still is held dear as "radical", opened up a chasm that posits revolution without actually naming it'. The lyrics state that 'Like communism, like anarchism, like punk, like reggae...Socialism is a racket / It's how you hide your submission to the dominant banality, it's how you conform whilst appearing to oppose' (Slater 1998). The lyrics are making the point that *isms* and ideologies rather than opposing actually provide conformity. This follows Debord's view that Situationist tactics should avoid becoming an *ism* – *Situationism* (Plant 1992). If one is to escape from such duality a Situationist revolution of everyday life is required. James Nice described Royal Family & The Poor as 'less of a group than a pseudo-Situationist provocation' (2011: 102).

Perhaps Factory's most explicit implementation of Situationist ideas was the creation of the Hacienda nightclub. When Wilson was asked whether the Hacienda was conceived as a nightclub or as a venue, his response was that 'neither, it was very much conceived as a space' (Savage 1992: 21). We should mention here that Situationist tactics, in line with its over-arching idea that revolution has to be achieved through changes in everyday life, often involved disrupting traditional uses of spaces. 'Architecture was the key to this situationist consciousness: whether discovered in the city or the mind, architecture mapped out revolutionary desire' (Sadler 1998: 164). Accordingly, Factory had always been interested in putting on gigs and club nights. In fact Factory did club nights before they released any

records. The first Factory production was the Factory Club itself. The club began in January 1978 when Wilson, then TV presenter on Granada Television, formed a partnership with Alan Erasmus, an unemployed actor and band manager. Wilson and Erasmus decided to start a club night that featured local bands. A 'Factory for Sale' sign gave Erasmus and Wilson the name for the club night. Richard Boon, Buzzcocks manager, says The Factory Club was a space where things could happen (Nice 2007). This could be a space where the construction of situations could take place, where Situationist liberation of everyday life would be possible. The 'Factory Club' ran at the Russell Club in Hulme Manchester from 1978 to 1979. The Factory Club night then moved to Oozits in Central Manchester in 1980. Elaborating on the theme of Situationism they called the new night 'The Beach Club' after the Situationist slogan 'Beneath the Pavement – The Beach', which was sprayed on Paris walls amidst the barricades of 1968. On first impression it refers to the sand beneath the cobblestones, which were used by students to throw at the police, but Heathcote points out that the meaning relates to the Situationist 'conviction that the city streets, the expression of capital and consumption, could be rediscovered and subverted through a new praxis of aimlessness, of drifting through them discovering new connections and revealing unexpected histories' (2011). However, Factory managers were not content in running a club night at a venue that they did not own. Hence, in 1981 a plan was constructed to create their own nightclub and by the same token to transform an urban space, which led to opening the Hacienda in May 1982. It was actually Rob Gretton who came up with this name, being inspired by reading a copy of Christopher Gray's *Leaving the 20th Century*, given to him by Tony Wilson. In this book we find such a passage:

And you, forgotten, your memories ravaged by all the consternations of two hemispheres, stranded in the Red Cellars of Pali-Kao, without music and without

geography, no longer setting out for the hacienda where the roots think of the child and where the wine is finished off with fables from an old almanac. Now that's finished. You'll never see the hacienda. It doesn't exist. (Gray [1974] 1998: 15)

The original meaning of a 'hacienda' is a large homestead in a ranch or estate usually in places where colonial Spanish culture has had architectural influence, such as in South America and Mexico. The reference to a 'hacienda' offered by Gretton gives the impression of a place that only exists in our dreams. It was Wilson's and Gretton's intention to make such a place a reality; they announced that 'the Hacienda must be built' (Savage 1992). Downstairs in the Hacienda club was a cocktail bar called 'The Gay Traitor', which referred to Anthony Blunt, a homosexual British art historian who spied for the Soviet Union. The two other bars, 'The Kim Philby' and 'Hicks' (codename for Guy Burgess), were also named after Blunt's fellow spies. These names were suggested by Wilson and reflect his Situationist leanings and by the same token anti-establishment and subversive leanings, because the Cambridge spy ring had not only successfully leaked many national secrets, but they were also an embarrassment to the British establishment, having been members of the establishment themselves.

The transformation of the urban space of the Hacienda can be best explained through the theories of Henri Lefebvre, a post-Marxist thinker who was himself influenced by the work of Debord and the Situationists. Lefebvre suggests that this influence was around the notion of 'constructed situations' (Ross 1997: 67). In a number of respects the Hacienda can be seen as a manifestation of Henri Lefebvre's idea of transformation of everyday space, as conveyed in this passage:

Pressure from below must therefore also confront the state in its role as organizer of space, as the power that controls urbanization, the construction of buildings and spatial planning in general. The state defends class interests while simultaneously setting itself above society as a whole, and its ability to intervene in space can and must be turned back against it, by grass-roots opposition, in the form of counter-plans and counter-projects designed to thwart strategies, plans and programmes imposed from above. (Lefebvre [1974] 1991: 383)

For Lefebvre, revolution of everyday life is inextricably linked to what he terms the ‘production of space’. Such production happens through both physical transformations, most importantly buildings and highways, discursive means and everyday usage of space (Lefebvre [1974] 1991: 46). The modern city itself is meant to be the testing ground for new Marxist thinking and utopian radical praxis: ‘The urban became at once the dread zone and the nemesis of capitalist modernity, the cradle of unprecedented commodification as well as the incubator for new experimental lived moment’ (Merrifield 2006: 60). Wilson also realized that if Factory were to have an impact it needed to produce an appropriate space. The Haçienda can be considered an example of these ‘experimental lived moments’. In this respect it can be argued that Wilson had a greater appreciation of the Situationist theory than Malcolm McLaren. After all McLaren was unashamedly capitalistic. Wilson recalls the argument he had with Factory music producer Martin Hannett on the building of the Haçienda. Hannett wanted to use the money to buy a Fairlight synthesizer, which would have enabled a range of new music production possibilities for Factory. Wilson’s response to Hannett was ‘buildings create creativity... Buildings change the way people think’ (Nice 2007). It can be argued that the Haçienda had a significant impact on how people thought

about space and music, which then went on to have a significant role in the creation of the acid house warehouse scene in the North of England in the late 1980s.

Situationism was the strongest European influence on Factory Records, but it was not the only one. Others include the artwork that Factory used, in part down to the role of the designer Peter Saville. For example, the cover for New Order's *Power, Corruption & Lies* is a reproduction of the painting *A Basket of Roses* by French artist Henri Fantin-Latour, a painting that influenced Impressionism but was conservative in style. While Joy Division's *Closer* album uses a photograph of Bernard Pierre Wolff of the Appiani family tomb in the Cimitero Monumentale di Staglieno in Genoa, Italy, the photograph of a sculpture by Demetrio Paernio displays a strong sense of classicism. The album cover for New Order's *Movement* was a typographical adaption of a poster by the fascist futurist Fortunato Depero; the result is a cover that signals European modernism. Saville recalls the discussion he had with Section 25 for the cover for *Always Now*, saying they requested something 'European, psychedelic with some oriental influences, that's all I had, I was on my own' (Nice 2007). There were a number of record sleeve artists and designers in the late 1970s and early 1980s, many with connections to the Manchester and the North, who paid homage to European artists in a similar way (Brook et al. 2016). For example, Futurism and Constructivism were popular with punk record sleeve designers such as Barney Bubbles, in many ways the leading post-punk graphic designer of the era, who created many album covers for artists including Elvis Costello and Ian Dury and the Blockheads. Bubbles had been working as a professional designer for some years at the time of punk and was certainly a big influence on Malcolm Garrett (Bestley and Ogg 2014). Garrett deserves a mention here in relation to Manchester record cover design, with his Buzzcock covers. Bubbles also certainly had an influence on Neville Brody, and to some extent on Saville.

Saville's designs are in many ways distinctive due to the lack of any textual information on the covers themselves (King and York 2003), which gave an impression of appropriating the European influences without any critical distance: with unconditional love, one might say. This style of design can be also seen as a way to distinguish themselves from the major recording companies, hence adding to the creation of a distinctive identity. Having album sleeves without artist and title text was not a new phenomenon; examples range from the White Album, Velvet Underground & Nico and Dark Side of the Moon, to various covers produced by the Hipgnosis design agency in the early 1970s, through to Throbbing Gristle at the end of the decade. However, the lack of textual information and appropriation of European design influences is certainly an identifying constant throughout Saville's Factory covers.

Finally, we should mention that Factory bands sought popularity in continental Europe rather than in the United States, which is seen as a typical strategy of English bands. One of the key events in their history was Joy Division and Cabaret Voltaire playing *Plan K* in Brussels on 16th October 1979. Chris Watson of Cabaret Voltaire said it was not really a gig but more of a happening with it evolving over two days (quoted in Nice 2007), which took place in an old multi-level Sugarbeat warehouse. Meaningfully, for members of Joy Division this was their first time abroad. As a result of this gig a Belgian imprint of Factory Records was set up, called Factory Benelux, also known as 'our friends in Belgium and Holland'. Realizing that Factory bands were popular with European audiences Factory Benelux released a large number of exclusive recordings as well as Benelux issues of regular Factory releases. It was seen as a good way of releasing more Factory material (Annik Honoré quoted in Nice 2007). This arrangement was highly unusual, because record labels normally do not agree to give so much autonomy to an organization not directly under their control. This case should be seen in the context of Wilson's Europhilia. Another outcome of the *Plan K* visit was Factory

deciding to have ‘pet projects’ with two Benelux bands, Minny Pops and The Names. Both bands were invited to Strawberry Studios in Stockport to work with Martin Hannett. The recordings were then released on Factory. This happened because Wilson and Gretton wanted to start releasing European bands and artists on the label (Nice 2007).

On the whole, for Factory bands a strategy of seeking popularity in Europe worked. It is worth recalling here a scene from Winterbottom’s *24 Hour Party People* that shows Vini Reilly of the Durutti Column playing to an empty Hacienda. On the commentary track for the film, however, Tony Wilson makes it clear that this is a ‘bit unfair’ because Vini had a ‘real audience’: ‘you can take him to Portugal and you get two thousand people, you can take him to Paris and you get eight hundred people, and in Manchester you get five or six hundred’. This quote suggests that some of the Factory bands were more popular in Europe than in England and most likely than they were in the States. Certainly there were far more Durutti Column album and single releases in Europe than there were in the United States. There might be a number of reasons for this. In particular, the Durutti Column did not easily fit into the categories used by the British music press, as its music included elements from jazz, folk, classical music and rock, and it revealed a ‘classical feel’. In Europe it was more appreciated because Europe is traditionally more sympathetic to heterogeneous art. As Chris Watson argued, the Durutti Column was able to find appeal from a ‘much less tribal audience’ in Europe (quoted in Nice 2007).

Factory records and a northern identity

A consideration of the regional response and influence is central to understanding Factory Records. In many respects Factory Records reacted against, what Tomaney (2010) calls, the belief that the region is inferior and subordinate. Tomaney explains that regional culture has

been disparaged in the contemporary period. He says modernization, and its bedfellows, standardization and homogenization, was assumed to erode the importance of 'local attachments'. The creation of welfare states and national education and media systems typically meant that, for social scientists at least, the 'local' or 'regional' was a residual category of diminishing significance. Quite often, especially in cultural and academic commentary, the very idea of regional culture is viewed as normatively problematic, hinting at backwardness and reaction. At the very least, throughout most of the modern period Tomaney says the term 'regional' has been used to denote something culturally 'inferior' or 'subordinate'. Certainly Factory can be seen as a response to the perceived inferiority of regional culture, showing that music produced in Manchester could be as good as if not better than that emanating from the capital. Of course Factory Records was not alone in reacting against the view that the production of its music was subordinate. Bestley (2012) points out that there were a number of local and regional interpretations of punk and post-punk styles. Of course there were also other punk and post-punk bands identified with Manchester. Factory themselves can be seen to have emerged from the wider upcoming punk generation that included Slaughter & the Dogs, Rabid Records, Buzzcocks, Jilted John and Warsaw themselves. On the other hand, 10cc had a crucial role in helping local bands record with their Strawberry Studios in Stockport. Electric Circus, which became the pre-eminent punk venue in the city, was originally a heavy metal venue. In fact the mix of punk with other music genres was one of the particular strengths and characteristics of the Manchester punk and post-punk music scene. It is what led the Deeply Vale festivals in nearby Bury to be called the first punk/hippie festival (Hewitt 2014).

Wilson was not only a music producer, but also a media personality, working for Granada television and the BBC. This gave him an ambiguous position in relation to the media industry, dominated by the logic of what Debord describes as the world 'spectacle'. On the

one hand, he had to accept the conventions of the media industry; on the other hand he tried to use the media spotlight, and participate in the capitalist 'spectacle', to further his agenda, whether this was greater involvement of young people in political discussion, highlighting Manchester as an artistic and cultural European centre, or giving more status to the English regions. Wilson was fully aware of his role when he said:

There is no celebrity quite as powerful as the local, homegrown celebrity. You're on TV every night like Chris Tarrant. But you're not completely contained within the format, and you're expressing your own views, and being yourself, which is not allowed to network presenters. The special relationship between the region and a regional celebrity means that people feel that they have a special investment in you.
(quoted in Hodgson 2002)

Slater has pointed out that Wilson was similar to Debord's Situationist friend and publisher Gerard Lebovici, who was involved with the entertainment industry through his activity in French cinema and publishing (Slater 1998). It should be added, though, that Wilson's ability to use television for his own purposes did not happen automatically, but over time, with a build-up of his regional audience. Wilson's background in regional television with Granada was particularly influential for his attempts to create the North West as a distinct cultural region. Granada's strapline before both networked and regional programming was originally 'From The North, Granada Presents...' with a large arrow pointing upwards (representing the north) being part of the caption. Wilson and Granada were strongly influenced by its founder Sidney Bernstein who believed it was possible to build a creative industry away from the metropolitan atmosphere of London. In a way this represented the 'official' media's approach

to decentralization of broadcasting. However, such an approach would not have given sufficient freedom of expression for those associated with alternative music scenes.

Being born in Salford, Wilson certainly had a great deal of affection and affinity for the North West region, starting his book *24 Hour Party People* with:

England's North West, the background to our little tale, is a bit like that bit of semi-desert between the Tigris and the Euphrates in Iraq; a piece of land and a bunch of people that changed the world forever and then sank back into obscurity. In their aridity and poverty seem to pay the price for ever daring to kick evolution's arse....

This was the land that gave us the modern world. (Wilson 2002: 14)

Factory Records was a means to achieve Wilson's great goal of creating regional identity and proof that a viable music company can exist in the English regions and specifically in the North of England, supporting artists who do not need to relocate to London to record and win popular and critical recognition. In this context it is worth mentioning Manchester band Buzzcocks and their *Spiral Scratch* EP, which according to Simon Reynolds played the key role in the development of British independent music (2006: 75). Reynolds explains that *Spiral Scratch* can be considered a more important record than the Sex Pistols' 'Anarchy in the U. K.' because the Sex Pistols' single showed that anyone could be in a rock band, whereas *Spiral Scratch* proved that anyone could release a record, without needing an established record label. Reynolds goes on to contend that the EP was 'a regionalist blow' by the Manchester band against the London-based music industry (2006: 98). Furthermore, according to Jon Savage it was instrumental in establishing the small labels and scenes in both Manchester and Liverpool (Savage 2005: 298). It is interesting to note that the producer of *Spiral Scratch* was Martin Hannett, one of the founders of Factory Records. With the

success of *Spiral Scratch*, Tosh Ryan and Martin Hannett created an independent label, Rabid Records. Rabid would build up artists with a few punk singles and then license them to bigger labels. Wilson got the idea of running an independent label from Ryan. However, Wilson believed that Factory could work without licensing artists to bigger labels. In many respects Factory followed the template of *Spiral Scratch* EP, with all the music on Factory being owned by the artists.

Ownership of music being retained by the artists was not unique to Factory. There were similar arrangements made by other independent labels, notably Rough Trade with its cooperative system. Factory also needed to work with other independent labels and the Cartel (Ogg 2009) to distribute their music. The Factory story therefore needs to be told within the wider story of independent record labels and the resulting revolution of popular music. Many of these independent labels also had their origins in the regions, and a number of them such as Fast Product, Mute and Postcard had links with Continent.

There was a North West regional music scene prior to Factory, ranging from Merseybeat, to Roger Eagle's Twisted Wheel, to the Wigan Casino. In a number of respects Factory drew on their experience, in particular its focus on nightclubs. After all, the Twisted Wheel was located on the same Manchester street as the Hacienda. However, none of these scenes had their own record label associated with them, not least because neither of their managers had the political ambitions of the sort harboured by Wilson. Wilson believed Factory could and should be a successful record company based in Manchester, countering the influence of London. It is not accidental that *City Life*, a Manchester-based listings magazine, emerged in this period, which also helped shape a Manchester and North West regional identity.

The question can be asked why a regional record label such as Factory could not develop prior to the late 1970s. A key reason was the availability of recording studios, with a suitable setup and availability at an affordable cost. Crucial for the development of Factory Records

was the accessibility of three local recording studios utilized by Hannett. The studios were Pennine Studios in Oldham, Cargo Studios in Rochdale, and Stockport's Strawberry Studios. These studios provided good alternatives to London-based recording studios. Without them, local bands would have had to travel to London to get the required production and technical expertise, making it impossible to create the regional music scene. The studios themselves have an interesting background. Strawberry Studios was in fact opened in the 1960s and was owned by members of 10cc, who wanted to work in their own studio. It was also home to Manchester artists like Herman's Hermits and The Mindbenders. Cargo Studios was also associated with another local band, Tractor, who was closely linked to the Deeply Vale free festivals held in 1976, 1977, 1978 and 1979.

Any consideration of identity creation needs to account for the audience. Writer and poet Howard Slater provides a thought-provoking autobiographical account of how Factory Records helped shape his identity as a person living in the North of England.

I was born in Preston, near Manchester, and was growing up around the time of punk, playing in bands and bunking off school to hang out in the library! In many ways the small label scene of Manchester (Factory, New Hormones, Rabid, etc.) was the North West's version of the punk scene, and without going into too much detail I've always considered that what was called 'New Wave' contained much more than the often overhyped and London-centric punk scene.

Perhaps it could be said that Factory and their version of punk gave working class kids like me the confidence to pursue ideas, books and creativity without becoming a student or going through the education system. After all Ian Curtis was a self-taught lyricist, and that he had read stuff like Kafka and J.G. Ballard was as much an inspiration as the music he was a part of (Slater 1998).

Nick Redfern in his analysis of the Michael Winterbottom's film *24 Hour Party People* describes how the film shows a new cultural space in the city being developed that is free of the centralizing influences of the London-based music – a 'sphere of culture' – which had a regional identity. Redfern describes how Factory and Hacienda were the key catalysts in the Manchester music scene (Redfern 2005). Although not totally a Factory phenomenon, the roots of the scene in the Hacienda, the dominance of the scene by Factory band the Happy Mondays, and the visual identity created by Factory designers Central Station put Factory at the centre of this brief-lived scene that re-invigorated the fortunes of both Manchester and Factory Records. In a way the location of Manchester provided a unifying influence of a shared location, aided by the fact that it was a good distance away from the capital city. Wilson wanted Factory Records and his other cultural activities to not only reflect on the North West but to impact on it. He was a key player in local politics and supported a campaign for a regional assembly for the North West. In order to forward this agenda he helped form The Necessary Group after a line in the United States Declaration of Independence in 2002 with the mission to campaign for devolution for the North West. The Necessary Group was made up of politicians and opinion formers keen to see an elected regional assembly. Wilson even asked Peter Saville to design a flag for the North West (BBC News 2004). However, 'Wilson later said that there was 'horrendous' apathy about devolution, blaming the media for ignoring the issue' (Taylor 2010).

Conclusion

Factory Records shared a number of similarities with other punk and post-punk independent labels. It resembled them in the way they reacted to their music potentially being classed as regionally backward, culturally inferior and subordinate. Like other punk and post-punk independent labels Factory had European connections. For Factory though it is the

combination of these links with the incorporation of a European radical tradition, in particular the use of the Situationist approach to the urban environment, that makes it distinctive. In answering the question ‘what is the significance of European radical traditions on Factory?’ there is much to advocate that the influence of a European radical tradition was significant both in the formation and in the operation of Factory Records. Through the assimilation of a European radical tradition, Factory was able to produce new ways of shaping and interacting with urban space. As already mentioned the producer Martin Hannett wanted to use the money for the Hacienda to purchase a Fairlight synthesizer. Perhaps this is something another music label might have done. However, Wilson’s response was typically Situationist – ‘buildings create creativity... Buildings change the way people think’. This did not mean Wilson wanted the Hacienda to be a permanent monument. In archive footage of the Hacienda Tony Wilson opens the film, titled *Do You Own The Dancefloor*, declaring that ‘nostalgia is a disease’, saying that the building should not be preserved, and that erecting flats in the city centre was more important – ‘Nostalgia is unnecessary’, he said. ‘People know it happened’ (Youngs 2015). The incorporation of a European radical tradition for Factory enabled things to happen. As John Harris (2007) puts it in his obituary to Tony Wilson, ‘the records came out. The Hacienda got built. Things happened’.

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