‘I’m Looking Through You’

The audiovisual contract and collective images of Liverpool from *The Magnet* to *Beat City*

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(Robert Persig, 1974:331)

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'[…] Like one of those movie dissolves in which you know you're not in the real world, but it seems that way anyway.' (Robert Persig, 1974:331)

Audiovisual histories are assembled on the basis of phenomenologies: they consist of mutual profiles between the sounds and the visuals and these award us certain 'types' of reality. The primacy of the eye and the ear informs us of the 'truth' and therefore correlates with the human tendency to ascribe exceptional credence to sounds and visuals on the basis of their inter-related sensory veracity. This, one might suggest, is an isomorphism created by the designer or director that can clearly be identified by the viewer as 'real'; Nicola Phillips uses Chion's work to consider how the audiovisual contract is put into practice in order to create a syntax of authentic imagery:

> The first section is concerned with elucidating how sound and image transform one another in the filmgoer's perception. According to Chion, this transformation occurs not because of any "natural harmony" between image and sound, but owing to the "audio-visual contract", wherein, "the two perceptions mutually influence each other...lending each other their respective properties by contamination and projection." (9) Chion's notion is that sound, for example, music, "adds value" to the image. The nature of the synchronous sound causes the filmgoer to construe the image differently, and hence the relationship of sound and image in film should not be described simply as "associationist", but as "synergetic"; they enter into a "contract" in the filmgoer's perception.[1]

Genres of imagery and sound are therefore vital for the (popular music) historian to acknowledge, for such sound and visual integrations operate via schema of mapping and interpretation. One result of this acknowledgement of such integrated semiotics ought to be a reminder that history is usually there to represent someone, rather than something. Yet this is not always understood, for audiovisual narratives present us

[1] Phillips, Nicola, *Book Review: Michael Chion Audio-Vision—Sound on Screen, (*1994), New York Columbia University Press, http://filmsound.org/philips.htm, (Date Accessed: 29th September 2015)

with a *sine qua non* – i.e. audio and visuals together are considered self-evidently 'bona fide' because of their very synchronisation. An audiovisual **contract** therefore exists, from which an agreed understanding of reality emerges.

Both Peter Atkinson and Ian Inglis have to a certain extent recognised such commutative semiotics via the ways that the early Beatles management of Brian Epstein (and Tony Barrow) dealt with portrayals of the group's cultural origins by and through the contemporary British audiovisual media of the early-1960s. For example, Atkinson's 'The Beatles and the Broadcasting of British Cultural Revolution, 1958-63'[2] is a superb piece of writing from a media specialist who comprehends the significance of (particularly commercial) television in the portrayals of the North of England, including Liverpool, in relation with the advent of the Beatles. By referencing equivalent television paradigms such as Dennis Mitchell's *Morning in the Streets*, Tony Warren's *Coronation Street* and the BBC-produced *Z Cars* series,[3] together with the synchronic satire of *That Was The Week That Was*, Atkinson shows us how in the late-1950s and early-1960s, the power of tele-visual representation in the UK helped to create an audiovisual cauldron into which the Beatles were effectively plunged. If one bears in mind that such TV programmes were also part of a preceding audiovisual continuum in which British films such as *The Magnet, Violent Playground* and *These Dangerous Years* (all shot in Liverpool in the 1950s) were integral component paradigms, we have a litany of 'agreed' imagery concerning the city of Liverpool: one which contributes to both the media stereotyping and pan-generational reception of the Beatles by late-1963. In other words, special correlations produced by sound and visuals were effectively ascribed to Liverpool – and they stuck.

Another of Atkinson's essay 'The Beatles on BBC Radio in 1963: the scouse inflection and a politics of sound in the rise of the Mersey Beat'[4] also proposes that the post-WWII British broadcast media and the contextual connotations surrounding the spoken word via radio interviews also require our collective attention. In the case of

[2] Jarniewicz, Jerzy and Alina Kwiatkowska [eds.] (2010), *Fifty Years with The Beatles: The Impact of the Beatles on Contemporary Culture*, Lodz [Poland]: University Press
[3] Z Cars began in 1961 and was set on the outskirts of a 'fictional' Liverpool – 'Newtown' i.e. Kirkby
[4] see *Popular Music and Society*, 34/2

the Beatles, the potential socio-linguistic differences, between themselves and (say) Cliff Richard in (say) a radio interview invites investigations into (e.g.) British integrated broadcasting systems such as BBC radio technology, 'received pronunciation', Tin Pan Alley requirements such as elocution, and the BBC's interest in but lack of understanding of regional dialects, etc. Atkinson considers the very sound of the spoken Beatles on British radio to be of great significance: their pronunciations and elucidations via their perhaps 'modern' scouse accents. And while he identifies this as Northern in a geographical sense, he wisely uses John Belchem's oft-quoted exemplar for the Liverpudlian as being: 'in the north but necessarily not part of it'.

Similarly, Ian Inglis', 'Here, There and Everywhere: Introducing the Beatles'[5] is an excellent re-assessment of the significance of the Beatles' first UK TV appearances. Inglis suggests that the historical 'givens' about such appearances are that we should concern ourselves with only a small number of prime-time, nationally transmitted entertainment and variety shows towards the end of 1963 – particularly those following the 13th October broadcast of *Sunday Night at the London Palladium*. However he convincingly argues that the group had already achieved a significant amount of TV-mediated popularity before this emergence, mostly as a result of Brian Epstein's willingness to have his group participate in a steady round of regional TV programmes during 1962 and 1963, including important slots on children's programmes and news magazine shows – neither of which were aimed primarily at the active consumption of popular music.

Such evidence suggests that a kind of ***ur-***history of popular music-related audiovisual imagery exists, which requires the fullest attention of the popular music researcher when taking into consideration the UK popularity of the Beatles. It might be argued that Daniel Farson's *Beat City* (broadcast nationally on ITV, Christmas Eve, 1963 – see on) not only codified at least three months of cross-generational excitement concerning the group, but also linked this to the coded typecast of the city of Liverpool

[5] in Inglis, Ian [ed.] (2010), *Popular Music and Television in Britain*, Farnham: Ashgate.

already sealed into the consciousness of film, radio and TV receivers via the audiovisual contract.

Although broadcast-created historical narratives are what broadcast-narrators make and are assembled via specific contexts, we also co-produce such audio-visual imagery via our complicities and enthusiasms: they are inevitably interpretive and although they appear to present realities and neutralities, they do so only according to complicit matrixes.

Pre-WWII examples of Liverpool as an audio-visual subject

Two British films from the mid-late 1930s feature Liverpool prominently in their narratives and help invoke and codify Liverpool as a significant, yet transitory place. First, from 1936 is an ATP (i.e. early Ealing Studios) work featuring 1930s actor Peter Haddon[6] entitled *The House of The Spaniard*. In this film Liverpool is regarded as merely a portal-cum-gateway in which (in this case) mysterious moneyed people ('Spaniards') move backwards and forwards shipping arms to Spain. Haddon's character appears to be symbolically English in a part of the country barely attached to Englan. He is therefore a 'newcomer' to Liverpool and so acts as an interlocutor of the city to the viewing public; his character exists in an elevated class-based netherworld of open-top cars, apartment-borrowing, and game shooting. Liverpool is only seen through voyeuristically via a car window. Apart from a couple of locations shots of the Pier Head, and a comic vignette involving Liverpool's recently (1934) constructed Mersey Tunnel, little is seen of the city, as the action moves to what appears to be the Deeside marshes, thence to Spain. The film's emphasis ignores most of the city's social structures for the sake of developing though movement and transaction, a simple plot of intrigue; thus, as a place, Liverpool is seen as transient, rootless and abstract. Not one 'recognisable' Liverpool accent is audible; we might at first be critical of this (together with the London-based studio from which the film emerged), but we would have to bear in mind possible difficulties in locating readily

[6] Haddon was born in Rawtenstall, Lancashire, but often on film portrayed a Public School 'type'

identifiable, homogenous vocal communications of Liverpool at that time, for oral historical evidence does exist suggesting that the scouse accent as we have come to know it, was not fully developed at this time and that both Irish and Lancashire accents proliferated[7].

Another film encountered by this writer and based in Liverpool (this time from 1938) is a very different affair featuring as it does renowned Welsh actor Edmund Gwenn (later immortalized in the USA via *Miracle on 34th Street*) playing an affable Mersey tug captain, popular Irish comedy actor Jimmy O'Dea as his mate, and dance band vocalist Betty Driver as his daughter. We witness opening location shots of the River Mersey and the riverfront but, as with *The House of The Spaniard*, little-nothing of the city, itself. The film was probably made to at least partially capitalise on the fact that by this time Liverpool was directly associated with the immensely popular football pools (both Littlewoods and Vernon's Pools were based in Liverpool). Therefore, *Penny Paradise*'s thin plot of a punter 'winning' on the 'Treble Chance' but finding that a friend had failed to post the coupon back to the pools company was probably a common British folk-nightmare. One close shot of the offending brown envelope is appropriately addressed 'Liverpool', a recognizable communal signifier for perhaps hundreds of thousands of punters across the UK at this time. The broader appeal of Association Football is also emphasized via discussions concerning the fortunes of the Arsenal, Chelsea, Newport and Stockport football clubs take place. When a list of football results is displayed over a backdrop of action sequences, Liverpool and Everton football clubs are oddly noticeable by their absence.

As with *The House of The Spaniard* there are no audibly recognisable Liverpudlian accents (at least, to repeat, as we have come to know them); however Irish actor O'Dea provides the appropriate clichéd Irish associations with the city, and while Gwenn's accent is at times only rather loosely 'Northern', Betty Driver's portrayal is noticeably regionally authentic. The singer/actress was not Liverpudlian (she was born in Leicester, but raised in Manchester), and does not even attempt to carry any familiar

[7] Also, that if such accents were available. they might not have been considered decipherable.

(i.e. 'post-war') Liverpudlian accent; however in one scene defends 'her' city in the face of O'Dea's stereotypical pining for Ireland and she comes across as very believable.

Both films employ 1930s popular music, but such musical illustrations could not in any kind of mythologized 'natural' or 'folk' sense be considered indigenous to Liverpool. In *the House of The Spaniard* Brigitte Horne sings a 'Spanish-sounding' song at the piano in a quasi-Marlene Dietrich voice and throughout the movie a similarly Spanish-sounding non-diegetic soundtrack comes and goes. However, in the latter case the music resembles a rather phony variation on Geraldo's popular 'Gaucho Tango' style of the day. In the case of *Penny Paradise,* Betty Driver sings two good Tin Pan Alley songs: one a dance band number, the other a ballad, while O'Dea presents one of his popular ('Mrs. Mulligan'-style) comic 'Oirish' routines. In this interesting film the songs portray more of a populist, perhaps even 'working-class' sense of taste than anything to do with the specifics of place. Actually, such generics are in all likelihood a reasonably accurate representation of local Liverpudlian popular music tastes at this time. Dance bands were 'all the rage' right across the entire UK in the 1930s – and Liverpool was no exception. Betty Driver was by the late-1930s in the process of becoming a very popular regional-style vocalist – both live and on record – with the kind true-to-life delivery we see and hear in *Penny Paradise*[8].

WWII and beyond

Come the war, the bombing of Liverpool did far more than scar the city physically, for it transfigured it for those looking on. These days it not generally realised that the Luftwaffe's destruction of inner-city Liverpool was broadcast across Britain in an extremely emblematic way. Indeed, the government thought that over-broadcasting the destruction and loss of life would lower morale. Of course, such devastation could

[8] At the outbreak of war, Betty Driver joined ENSA and, post-WWII regularly presented her own radio shows and sang with Henry Hall's band. Betty toured with the popular band Harry Gold and his Pieces of Eight, and also visited Australia, Malta and South Africa. Upon her return to Britain she appeared on stage in *The Lovebirds*, *Pillar to Post,* and *What A Racket,* then in the 1960s retired to run a pub with her sister. After being persuaded to attend an audition, Driver then went on to national fame in the Granada TV soap opera *Coronation Street*.

not be kept a secret; however, bombings were not always openly discussed ('careless talk costs lives') and the British population were advised (probably wisely) to 'get on with things' as much as possible. All wartime Movietone and Pathe broadcasts concerning bombings across Britain tended to represent destruction and loss of life via this specific 'all in it together' tone, thereby co-creating, rather than merely reporting an immense texturology of place with devastated cities used as optical artefacts of resistance. Althaus even argues that the newsreels of this time were 'more of a repeating medium than a reporting medium' and represented what might be described as both 'melodramatic' and 'soft'[9]syntagmatic composites.

Following the end of the WWII in 1945 this at least partial lack of the directly knowable became integral to a national register of supportive distance. Such identity-based geographical mind-sets are difficult to record, for they are not always constructed consciously, but instead refracted though a range of signifiers and connotations. This was not simply a matter of government policy: in the face of what many felt was US film cultural colonisation, British cinema managers also disliked the broadcasting of any domestic political issues on the silver screen. So, while documentaries relating to the bomb ravaged were commissioned (e.g. re Coventry: *A City Reborn*, 1945; *Phoenix City*, 1958), they did not always play across the major UK cinema networks. In the case of Liverpool, there were no such films; instead a folk text created from a narrative of observational detachment emerged. It was, in fact not until the mid-1960s, with both trade and population spectacularly declining that Liverpool City Council commissioned films such as *Turn of the Tide, Rates for the Job* and *Liverpool Sounding* in an attempt to attract inward investment and the upwardly mobile – but few people (especially those from Liverpool) ever saw these 'masterpieces'[10].

By the immediate post-WWII era British society had largely come to believe that sounds and images were intimately and causally related with reality, simply because they had been assembled together. This developed not only a progressively growing

[9] Althaus, SL (2010), 'The Forgotten Role of the Global Newsreel Industry in the Long Transition from Text to Television', *International Journal of Press/Politics* 15/2, p, 200, p. 196
[10] See North West Film Archive (2007), *Liverpool on Film* DVD, Manchester and Liverpool: North West Film Archive/Liverpool Record Office

strength of associative links between image, sound and reality but also a continuum of perception of place: people thought that they knew (e.g.) British cities because they had seen them at the cinema (or on the new technology of television). A 'real' (i.e. tactile) understanding of place was supplemented (perhaps even replaced) by a voyeuristic scenography created by a style of audiovisual representation (usually based around urban squalor, danger and juvenile delinquency) and a spatial milieu: a kind of structurally poetic, rather than a tangibly real, series of portrayals. Sounds and images of Liverpool, presented by film and TV (for example, re TV Alun Owen's 'loose trilogy' of Liverpool plays: *No Trams to Lime Street* 1959, *After the Funeral* 1960, *The Hard Knock* 1962) tended to present Liverpool in an apparently paradigmatic (i.e. 'different' from the rest of Britain) light. But this paradigm was always played out through a syntagmatic (i.e. 'consistent') national sceneographic entity, in its own right. As Peter Atkinson states: 'Owen's Liverpool trilogy helped imprint the ideas of the city in the British public's memory […] However 'No Trams' was not well-received in the city itself. Readers complained in the local press about ITV's 'poor presentation of Liverpool' and the use of the Liverpool accent […] This lends weight to the argument that the Beatles phenomenon of 1963 was accommodated within a wider context of […] cultural production, including the works broadcast on television.'[11]

Actually there is little doubt that within the increasingly media-saturated age of post-WWII Britain an audiovisual contract of Liverpool helped to germinate 'understandings' of the emergence of the Beatles via a scenography of place, subsequently helping to support an narrative of indicative taxonomy but whether this arrangement of the audiovisual was based in any sense on a 'real' Liverpool remains debatable.

The Magnet

Two films featuring Liverpool as a scenographic entity were released (or one might argue 'escaped'!) in 1950: *Waterfront* featuring Robert Newton, Kathleen Harrison,

[11] Atkinson, Peter (2010), 'The Beatles and the broadcasting of British cultural revolution, 1958-63', in Jerzy Jarniewicz and Alina Kwatkowska [eds.], *Fifty Years with the Beatles: The Impact of the Beatles on Contemporary Culture*, Lodz [Poland]: University Press, pp16-17.

Susan Shaw and a young Richard Burton together with *The Magnet* starring Stephen Murray, Kay Walsh and a young James Fox (billed as William Fox). *Waterfront* was a Rank Organisation production (adapted from a 1934 novel written by Liverpool writer John Brophy), pitching the viewer back into the Great Depression of the 1930s; as a consequence, it lacked credible contemporaneous realism. It is not without interest, but the city of Liverpool only 'appears' as a rather ghostly backdrop to the ills of those caught in the depression (principally Newton and Burton). The film is complicit to the extent that it is 'emic' and therefore does not distinctively reflect any sense that Liverpudlian life might be 'etic': therefore, the action might have taken place in any British port city (and that is the point, really). *The Magnet,* however, although only a rather modest Ealing Studios 'light comedy' film (perhaps even aimed primarily at children), resonates contemporary post-WWII relevance via story revolving around a young New Brighton lad, Johnny Brent (Fox), whose deception in obtaining a magnet from a younger child leads to confusion: on the one hand, he carries an honourable guilt at his deception (and also thinks that the child has died as a consequence of his own wrong doings), whereas on the other he is hailed as a hero by adults.

Throughout the film Johnny's father (Murray), a psychotherapist probably practicing on Rodney Street in Liverpool delivers 'comical' Freudian 'mumbo-jumbo' to his long-suffering yet ever-loving wife (Walsh). Unlike *Waterfront*, *The Magnet*, (perhaps a less self-conscious film) delivers interesting binary oppositions between the classes on either side of the river Mersey. Liverpool is portrayed as stagnant city with unfinished war damage repairs and an incomplete cathedral. New Brighton on the other side of the river initially gives off the impression of a go-ahead seaside resort but ends up appearing to be little more than an inert Edwardian suburb with a cottage hospital existing out-with the (new) NHS: settling for a quiet life within a society whose structure inhibits growth and dynamism appears to be the rule of the day.

Young Brent, while off school and in quarantine with scarlet fever, manages to 'con' a younger boy out of a toy magnet on the beach at New Brighton by swapping it for his (i.e. Johnny's) 'invisible watch'. However, the little boy's nanny accuses Johnny of stealing; he escapes by running away but feels guilty. He then tries to dispose of the

magnet, particularly after an early 'Teddy Boy'-style youth (Harry Fowler) uses it to rack-up free-plays on a pinball machine at New Brighton's indoor fair. A fairground attendant ejects Johnny thinking he is involved in this deception. Johnny then meets a slightly eccentric mechanical engineer who is raising funds for an Iron Lung for the local cottage hospital. Johnny, in an act of contrition (and relief) gives him the magnet. The engineer goes on to tell the story of the boy's generosity regarding the magnet at subsequent fund-raising events, exaggerating wildly and characterizing Johnny as everything from a 'Little Lord Fauntleroy' to a ragged Dickensian orphan, all the while declaring that he hopes to find him again to reward him for the gift. Johnny's parents are present at one such event but do not equate these portrayals with their son.

After returning to school, Johnny again sees the little boy's nanny and partly overhears her telling her friend about her dead budgerigar which, she says, died of a broken heart. Johnny presumes she is talking about the little boy he cheated; he is now convinced that he is guilty of murder. He hides in the back of a Jacob's Biscuits van bound for Liverpool, where he then runs into a gang of local youths in the inner-city south-end of the city (close to Chinatown and at this stage the still only partially built Anglican Cathedral). A little bullying of Johnny takes place, but he wins over the gang by convincing them he is on the run for murder. After a riverside game of dare goes wrong and Spike the gang-leader falls through a rotted disused pier, Johnny ends-up helping to save the 'tough's' life and he is rescued and hospitalized in New Brighton. The injured boy is aided by the very Iron Lung for which the funds were raised and when Johnny visits Spike in hospital, he sees the magnet displayed on it. Spike tells him that when he leaves, he will 'have away' with the magnet: an early post-WWII example of the Liverpudlian 'tearaway' stereotype. Johnny also finally bumps into the engineer, who is delighted to have found his 'little hero'. The boy is awarded a Civic Gold Medal, which in the closing scene back on New Brighton sands, he returns the magnet to its rightful owner, his conscience now clear.

The Magnet was filmed in monochrome, mostly on location in and around New Brighton and Liverpool, and at the Ealing Studios. 'Authentic' local accents are universally absent until Johnny arrives in 'riverine' Liverpool; these accents are

intended to signify class (and to a certain degree) race divisions between 'ordinary' life on the two banks of the River Mersey. For example, Johnny's parents are probably too 'Home Counties' even for New Brighton (suggesting they have moved from the south of England), whereas each gang-member (including a Chinese boy) is convincingly Liverpudlian. The juxtaposition between these boys and the public schoolboy Johnny is furthered by the bomb damage and dereliction in the area (when Johnny first meets the boys, they are playing cricket on a 'bomb site'). In one scene filmed in the shadow of the semi-built Anglican cathedral near Upper Duke Street ('Chinatown'), the Chinese gang member is called home in Cantonese by his mother to what looks like a semi-derelict house; a small comic moment emerges when the boy explains in an authentic scouse accent that 'me mum sez it's time for me tea'.

The film did not achieve the level of popularity of better-known contemporary Ealing comedies such as *Passport to Pimlico (1949), The Man in the White Suit (1951)*, or *The Lavender Hill Mob (1951)*, but duly 'went the rounds' of the cinemas across the UK and was therefore viewed by many thousands of people. Film critic Leslie Halliwell described it as a 'very mild Ealing comedy, not really up to snuff' – which is probably correct. The British Film Institute's reviewer criticises it as 'somewhat burdened by cumbersome moralising and too many credibility-stretching coincidences and misunderstandings. It not only moralises, but also, as previously suggested presents an immobile image of a region divided by class, race and the river Mersey. So, rather than dealing directly with such issues in a perhaps more realistic way, *The Magnet* employs the old Ealing method of using light comedy (rather like the BBC's use of 'light' music at this time) to construct polarities, thereby providing a circumnavigation of important social issues and suggesting 't'was ever thus'.

Such stereotypes were true-to-life to a certain degree (in this case, areas of New Brighton (part of the town of Wallasey) had indeed been upwardly mobile since the mid-19th century and like Birkenhead, was for many, an important commuter town). However, the audiovisual contract maps New Brighton in direct contradistinction with Liverpool: the latter becomes the curios 'other' where deprived young people avoid school, avoid the police, and generally 'get up to no good'. We are presented with the

usual British filmic depictions of geographical centralities and margins. But in this case the actual spatio-cultural centralities which should demand our attention (inner-city Liverpool) are marginalized for the sake of suburban middle-class conformities and cohesions.

In some respects, this lack of debate is odd, given Ealing's known and respected 'commitment to portray the people of Britain and the background that shaped them was the mainspring of [their] post-war films'[12]. However, one might argue (as does Vincent Porter, in the above-quoted essay) that contemporary problems such as the conflicts between class and capital were generally not handled well by Ealing. In the case of *The Magnet*, the overall over-complicated yet somewhat ineffectual plot contained a hollow message concerning Liverpool's curious and perhaps scary 'otherness'. All comedy (especially light comedy) in post-war British films is often wittingly or unwittingly misused. While it can provide a framework to present important social issues and divisions, it also holds the potential to trivialise such concerns[13]. Therefore, *The Magnet* negates any possibility of serious discourse concerning the social positions of the Liverpool gang-members within the spatial dereliction of river-based Liverpool during this supposedly optimistic (yet for many deprived) post-WWII period. It is true that there are at least relatively 'real' people being denoted, but the few genuine Liverpudlians amongst them seem to be placed in a connoted 'nether world' of space and time.

It is argued by Ian Green that although Ealing comedies attempted to deal with uncomfortable post-WWII issues, they also tended to 'avoid, repress or displace the treatment of sensitive issues by, so to speak, drowning them in laughter.'[14] While those watching *The Magnet* would hardly 'drown in laughter' [!], this seems a valid point to make. The film's 'affectionate' treatment of Johnny and his anxieties, the poking fun at his father's professional Freudian 'psycho-babble', and the social

[12] Porter, Vincent (1983), 'The Context of Creativity: Ealing Studios and Hammer Films', in James Curran and Vincent Porter [eds.], *British Cinema History*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, p. 188
[13] An earlier Ealing 'rubble' film, *Hue and Cry* (1947) featuring a young Harry Fowler uses a still semi-destroyed London as its setting without any significant social commentary
[14] Green, Ian (1983), 'Ealing: in the Comedy Frame', in James Curran and Vincent Porter [eds.], *British Cinema History*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, p. 297

misalignment between Johnny and the Liverpool-based youths (indeed Liverpool as an urban jungle in juxtaposition with New Brighton as a relatively stress-free 'seaside' suburb) might have actually posited a bold suggestion that British society was failing its young people. Instead, in truly British fashion, it 'all works out well in the end' and ultimately we are all re-integrated in an emic sense into the social and political fabric of the country – a problematic discourse at the best of times, but certainly something of a fallacy by the 1950s.

These Dangerous Years

These Dangerous Years (1957) was an Associated British Pathe production also partially set in Liverpool. It was directed by Herbert Wilcox and produced by Wilcox's wife, actress Anna Neagle. The film was premiered at the ABC Forum Cinema, Lime Street, Liverpool on 24th June 1957 and the proceeds from that premiere were donated to the National Association of Boys' Clubs and the Liverpool Boys' Association. Both Anna Neagle and star of the film Frankie Vaughan shared an interest in the NABC. In Liverpool-born singer Vaughan's case, he had as a youth been an active member of a local Boys' Club and credited the club for keeping him on the 'straight and narrow'. Such comments rang that same bell across the UK concerning gang cultures and inner-city Liverpool as they had via *The Magnet*. The film premiere was part of Liverpool's 750th anniversary of its Royal Charter.

In *These Dangerous Years* Frankie Vaughan plays a south-Liverpool gang leader Dave Wyman, the leader of the 'Dingle Boys' from 'the Cast-Iron shore' and he also fancies himself as a singer; George Baker appears as an unlikely army padre and Carole Lesley plays Dave Wyman's girlfriend. Wyman is called-up for National Service and willingly joins the army to escape the gang culture in which he has entwined himself back home. He undergoes basic training, finds that the discipline suits him, and consequently starts to emerge a 'better' person. However, when his Army best friend is killed by the camp bully in an explosion, Wyman takes revenge. He then absconds and eventually finds himself back in the Dingle 'on the run' and hiding out. Eventually Wyman is prepared to take his medicine and hands himself in. The trails for the film

stated: 'this is the stuff life is made of: the problems, the laughter, the tears, all the important things and little things – and whatever your age, here is a film that will really punch home to you, for this is the story of every kid who ever grew up the hard way'.[15] The concern here is once more that Liverpool is regarded as a basis for exploring the problems of living in the real world- which is fair enough, but of course as with most British cinema offerings during the 1950s, it is only able to explore the problems that censorship deemed acceptable. Therefore, little more needs to be discussed about the plot. While proceeding along a 'realist' path this film could not be seen in the same way that one might view (for example) *A Taste of Honey* or *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*. The great problem with *These Dangerous Years* is that by the year of its release it is already an 'old' style film and no matter how much (so-called) social experience is inserted into it (e.g. the inner-city Liverpool tropes bringing menace and danger to the plot) the community scenes are practically ghostly: we do not know the people or care enough about them owing to the syntagmatic generalizations offered. For example, during the local shop and market scenes we might just as easily be (for example) on the Edgeware Road in London. Also the screen is so filled with extras that we are confused, geographically. Insofar as we do get to know Wyman, it is only via the miscast Frankie Vaughan who we recognize both visually and aurally (Wyman's singing does not help in this case because i) Frankie Vaughan, rather than Dave Wyman was by this time a popular singer in Britain, and ii) Vaughan does not have a rock 'n' roll timbre and the inauthentic big band 'take' on rock 'n' roll is laughable – hardly convincing and redolent of Vaughan's post-teen appeal.

The film also confuses the viewer throughout: for example, the Dingle community is unrealistically invoked: on the one hand we see their 'singular' working class way of life 'producing' the ills of society: gangs and gang members and we then witness the film almost celebrating their protection of 'one of their own'. Ultimately, we see a backwards-looking community, slow on the up-take, without any dynamism whichever way it turns to survive. The constructions are conventional stereotypes, not

[15] Advertising trail for *These Dangerous Years*, cited in the 'world premiere programme', Monday 24th June 1957

characterisations and, as the film proceeds it becomes clear that neither Herbert Wilcox nor Anna Neagle had the faintest knowledge about their subject matter. Compare, for example the end of *A Taste of Honey* with that of *These Dangerous Years* – one full of uncertainty and lacking in self-confidence, the other, utterly convinced of its own discourse. Of course, all films are metaphors for how humans experience life on a deeper level and creating a typology of metaphors and symbols from our surroundings is a large part of being a visual storyteller. But symbolic images drawn from aspects of society that do not fully grasp contexts over-simplify lived experiences that cannot be merely 'translated' for the rest of us – such is the case with *These Dangerous Years* and Liverpool's stereotype once more remains intact.

Violent Playground

Violent Playground is a 1958 Top Rank film directed by Basil Dearden. It stars Stanley Baker, Peter Cushing, and a young David McCallum (it also features in a supporting cameo, a young Liverpudlian: Freddy Fowell, later known as singer/comedian 'Freddie Starr'). Dearden began directing at Ealing Studios (for example the noteworthy portmanteau film *Dead of Night* contains a Dearden excerpt) and he went on to make several remarkable British films, such as *Victim* and, later, *Khartoum*. But Dearden does not appear to be held in very high regard by critics. This is something of a pity, for his work can be an interesting barometer of public taste. *Violent Playground* exists within the sub-genre of the juvenile delinquent movie and like *These Dangerous Years* has a social agenda. As such, it owes much to US films of a similar genre. It is a far superior piece of work to that of *These Dangerous Years* in many ways, but also falls foul of portraying static Liverpool stereotypes (once again, for example, the by this time more recognisable Liverpool accents are in remarkably short supply with Freddie Fowell being the only audibly authentically Liverpudlian cast member).

It would probably be accurate to state that most of Dearden's work tended to suggest that there were 'types' of working-class experiences that allowed certain aesthetic value judgments to be projected. For example, in *Violent Playground* the main protagonists are mostly males, certain males are outsiders, and a certain type of

masculinity is embedded from the start: the one which suggests legitimate hierarchies of value epitomised by one's refusal to be 'ground down'. So, although the Stanley Baker character in *Violent Playground* appears to have emerged (like Frankie Vaughan's Dave Wyman in *These Dangerous Years*) from authentic working-class experiences, he is also set apart: not only from the villains he is chasing, but also from his colleagues. Inner-city estates, such as the actual Gerard Gardens in Liverpool where several location shots are filmed, are represented as breeding grounds for youth crime where a dire need for juvenile liaison officers and social workers are required. Taking all this in mind, British audiences watching this film might have also noted that the poorest working-class subjects consisted of Irish stereotypes.

The film focuses on (yet another!) Liverpool street-gang, this time led by Johnny Murphy (McCallum). When reluctant Police Juvenile Liaison Officer Sergeant Trueman (Baker) visits the Murphy household on duty, he is attracted to Johnny's older sister (Anne Heywood).He also finds considerable points of similarity between his previous investigations as detective officer into the activities of an arsonist known as the 'Firefly', and his liaison work with Johnny Murphy – so the plot thickens. In the final sequence, pyromaniac Murphy holds a classroom full of children hostage at gunpoint. However, McCallum's character, in particular, is rather problematic, for while it references roles played by James Dean, Marlon Brando, and (especially) Vic Morrow - the latter in *Blackboard Jungle* - he seems an unlikely candidate for a Liverpool-based pyromaniac delinquent.

Perhaps typically, rock 'n' roll is presented as a negative cultural influence linked with juvenile delinquency and the generation gap. At the beginning of the film it is also associated with Black culture via the presence of a Black street urchin and an ugly stereotype is used in this respect. In another scene in Murphy's Gerard Gardens flat, rock 'n' roll appears to put the youths into a trance-like state which culminates in Johnny advancing menacingly towards Sgt Truman; the scene is actually unintentionally hilarious. Of course, juvenile delinquency and the generation gap were both hot topics in 1958; so too the 'problems' associated with audiovisual images of America. So, we also hear slang and 'hip' language emanating from teenagers

throughout the film. Arguably such language would have been anathema to most Liverpool youths of the day. In fact, Liverpudlian Mick O'Toole recalls feeling:

> Patronized [by the film]; it's laughable in maybe three way. First, in its depiction of crime, Irishness and youth in the Byrom Street area; it was for me at least, way off-beam: very inaccurate. Secondly, by the suggestion that a character such as Murphy would have had any currency as a gang-leader; thirdly, in the connections between the US, rock 'n' roll and language. I might have loved rock 'n' roll, but my pals and I didn't speak 'jive'. And we were really discriminatory in our music tastes! All because something had a beat didn't turn us into maniacs! We were incredibly fussy about what was and what wasn't the real thing; the music used in *Violent Playground* wasn't the real thing.[16]

The film does have its authenticities – and this is where Liverpool's spatial profile provides a sense of working-class life via exteriorising and visual iconography. *Violent Playground* was partially shot at the aforementioned Gerard Gardens development, but there are also analogous exterior shots across downtown and dock-related Liverpool; for example, there is an authentic bus journey along Stanley Road and Scotland Road, together with a car chase through the streets and docklands of the city. As with *The House of The Spaniard* and *The Magnet*, *Violent Playground* also uses the symbolic and voyeuristic Mersey Tunnel. Such scenes not only link the action, but also provide the ordinary as symbol, and architecture as connotation. This exteriorising at times successfully denotes both the ugly and the ordinary derived from familiarity, and also the 'modernistic' especially in the case of the new school where Johnny Murphy 'holes-up' (all modernist glass and concrete) which presents progressive educational ideas and are confirmed by the school's headmaster played by Welsh actor Clifford Evans. All of the school scenes successfully articulate an uncertain future for the city. All such elements (including rock 'n' roll), therefore act as symbols of uncertainty as well as expressive abstractions. The ordinary urban landscape is filled with all too familiar yet unsolvable problems and the modern is suggested as 'enriching', but also open to abuse, thereby adding a layer of caution concerning the new, the liberal. Therefore, a call for Liverpool's cultural 'richness' never really emerges from Liverpool's familiar scenography; once again it is viewed as inward and backwards concerning migration, religion and crime and presents a level

[16] Mick O'Toole to Mike Brocken, December 2013

of fear concerning how the new in the city might effectively run roughshod over the old.

Interior scenes were mostly shot at Pinewood Studios and one can see the joins between the north (Liverpool) and the south (studio plus one ambiguous scene set in a relatively well-appointed athletics ground: almost certainly 'home counties'). The film played throughout the UK on its initial release and, such was Stanley Baker's popularity was probably seen by millions, but it failed to break into the US marketplace where a glut of similar US films already existed. It is too easy to right off *Violent Playground* as a cash-in, for the contradistinctions and opposites on display to both ourselves and to Sgt Truman, are real enough. To win over the Murphy's – especially Cathie - the Sergeant has to 'speak their language' but he struggles with this while at the same time acknowledging that Cathie's codes of perception and values are definitely worthy of his attention. Apparently, *Violent Playground* was awarded a US release during the mid-1960s to cash in on both its trendy Liverpool subject matter following the emergence of the Beatles, together with McCallum's US popularity in his role as Illya Kuryakin in the TV series *The Man from U.N.C.L.E;* however by this time it would have appeared severely dated, rather like certain aspects of British cinema did in the mid-late 1950s: never losing its allegiance to an idealized community and holding out against the processes of both age and change.

Morning in the Streets

In terms of audiovisual representation via television, perhaps the utmost 'contract' of all time, history tells us that director/producer Denis Mitchell was already well into his forties before entering this noted phase of his career. Within a short period of time, however, he had become one of a small number of late-1950s TV documentary-makers applauded as significant artists in their own right. Although he is also strongly associated with Independent TV, his first successes came at the BBC and his projects ranged from full length TV works to ten-minute vignettes. Following its broadcast on 25th March 1959 *Morning in the Streets* became part of the BBC's non-theatrical documentary repertory, available for 16mm bookings. The work was described as an

impression of life and opinion in the back streets of a 'northern city in the morning' – but the northern city was never identified (and did not really exist), for Mitchell presented a montage made-up from views of Liverpool, Manchester, Salford and Stockport; interestingly, it was subsequently plundered for images and associated almost entirely with the city of Liverpool.

The work is an impressionistic 'slice-of-life' documentary, featuring footage of working-class people and street scenes, accompanied by a montage soundtrack of voices and music conveying and connoting philosophies on urban existence; thus, the artistic deceit is accepted. The film was researched by well-known Liverpool life and vernacular researcher and writer, Frank Shaw and bears his stamp as much as that of Mitchell's. It is one of the few televisual documents to reflect the post-war austerity felt in certain districts of a city such as in Liverpool in the 1950s and attempts to explode the myth of post-war cross-class affluence. The, at times interesting, and at other times rather irritating non-diegetic movie-style music soundtrack, full of violins and oboes, was specially composed by Thomas Henderson with assistance from Liverpool folkie-cum-songwriter Stan Kelly, and featured the harmonica playing of Tommy Reilly. Reilly was a renowned Canadian harmonica player who played the chromatic version of the instrument. Therefore, his playing connoted what might be described locally as a 'mouth organ' – which for some symbolized the instrument of the 'down-at-heel' beggar or tramp. The children's street and playground songs (featured throughout) are perhaps the most genuinely affective soundtrack, for the kids sing with an honesty and openness that cannot be found in the rather overly orchestrated composition. Mitchell was known to be creative with his use of sound, which possibly owed more to his earlier BBC radio career, than to any forebears in cinema or TV; nevertheless, there are musical echoes of Ealing Studios, here.

Mitchell's work has been rightly regarded as both important and innovative. It tended to challenge mainstream society's persistent occlusion of ordinary people's lives and experiences. We sympathise with the woman whose son has emigrated to New Zealand never to return, the WWI widow now into her sixties, and the woman who states that there were no 'good old days'. Yet insofar as it projected a schema for the

future, Mitchell's work is oddly ambiguous and hidebound by political theory. The film's most heartfelt discussion revolves around a visual portrayal of the built environment and how successive political leaders had repeatedly let down urban dwellers to the extent that a level of hopelessness pervaded. However, the film is blighted somewhat by poor characterisations such as 'Murphy the philosopher', the use of the rag and bone man's trumpet, and a joke concerning a budgie. The soundtrack's use of blue notes when a few Teddy Boys in a doorway come into view is more than a little condescending.

The final scene of children happily playing and singing in an urban school playground in a semi-derelict district of Liverpool is genuinely moving, suggesting that at least Denis Mitchell's heart was in the right place. The message is clear: despite the deprivation our future lay with these kids (if indeed we had a future in this atomic age, he also suggests). But the typecasting and stereotypes remain troubling and could be viewed from this historical distance as retrogressive and reactionary, rather than progressive and liberating in any cultural sense. Indeed, there is the suggestion that those living under such conditions were living to a large extent in 'benign delusion'. The unresolved philosophical problem related Mitchell's portrayal of 'Liverpool' is that, as a reformist, he wants a removal of the status quo to brings immediate amelioration; however as a revolutionist he wants the situation to deteriorate so that i) his prognosis of the 'crisis' of capitalism is confirmed and ii) dissatisfaction with reality stimulates mass action towards revolutionary change. But while we hear the word 'mass' being coined throughout the film, there is probably too little respect for individual facts concerning specific narratives of space and place, in all their inconvenient diversity. Indeed, the very suggestion that Liverpool, Manchester, Salford and Stockport could all be visually 'lumped together' is actually an ideological false premise. Nevertheless, the presence of this important impressionistic piece informs us that the tele-visual emergence of the Beatles four years later took place during a period in which images of 'their' city (and the urban northwest of England) were being compounded into a voyeuristic consciousness of place.

The Mersey Sound

By 1963 the BBC documentary *The Mersey Sound*, produced over four days in August that year by the renowned Lancastrian producer and radio playwright Don Haworth (broadcast on 9th October 1963) contained all of the above tropes and stereotypes, as the Corporation grappled with, but failed to comprehend how, following the stereotypes of the previous decade-or-so Liverpudlian exaggeration and irony was never far from the surface of any questionnaire concerning lived experiences in the city. Haworth was a true professional, but he was arguably institutionalised by and through the echelons of the BBC. So in spite of leaving us with some truly musically exciting moments (e.g. the live footage of the Beatles: shot on 27th August in an empty Little Theatre, Houghton Street, Southport; this footage was then edited in with screaming audience film from 26 August show at the Southport Odeon), the work remains highly questionable as a serious study of popular music activities in this ever-declining north-west England seaport.

As with its generic forbears discussed here, *The Mersey Sound* uses devices from the audiovisual contract to make things appear 'real'. The mixing of the observational with the staged, especially via the use of exterior linking shots, is of great significance. Before musical action is initiated, a series of contextualising shots is provided (usually via a band's van being loaded, or driven across the city, or emerging from the ubiquitous Mersey Tunnel), not so much to denote place, as such but to connote an environmental ambience as the vehicle passes areas of deprivation and decay). In between interview material which at times is highly questionable there are pauses to take account of these visual narratives: we see streetlamps, docks, pavement puddles, blocks of flats, etc. and these help to provide atmospheric information about 'context'. The exterior (or 'surplus') shots of Group One on the move are extended to form complete sequences, what might be described as 'descriptive syntagma', where typical shots of places are presented without any particular narrative function, other than the need to drive through and (presumably, to link with the narrative) out the other side! As a consequence, we have a mélange of audiovisual images of working-class life which do not really integrate with the narrative as a whole, and do not represent the

diversity of Liverpool's cultural and spatial landscape. One might therefore make the case that, at least by the time *The Mersey Sound* was broadcast, a litany of socio-spatial imagery had long existed concerning representations of Liverpool. Such a litany was one of exclusion as much as inclusion: a prescriptive 'otherness'- with ironically the Lennon and McCartney localities of Allerton and Woolton most certainly 'not on the map'. Other noticeable absences included reliable Liverpool accents at crucial stages, ethnicities as anything other than stereotypes, outer-city districts, middle-class representations, and new developments. In all cases, images revolved around emplacement and positioning, what Michel Foucoult might describe as 'little tactics of the habitat'.

Therefore, in a very particular way, in *The Mersey Sound* the Liverpool popular music scene (specifically musicians, club-owners, bouncers, fans etc.) came to be seen as a microcosm for the ailments of British society: reflecting both criminal activity and 'otherness'. Any attempts to unmask our contemporary world will always be of value; however practically everything unpacked by these visages of Liverpool in 1963 also existed under another mask. This mask was one of BBC mystification in which the subjects appear almost beyond society's help in spite of (as in the case of *Violent Playground*) there existing systems to 'deal' with such 'problems'. It is from within this British culturally institutionalized pot of audiovisual images (including those connoting the cultural thinness of America) that an inarticulate, anachronistic image of the Beatles and 'the place from whence they came' emerges towards the last few months of 1963. The final interview with the Beatles in *The Mersey Sound* sheds an interesting light on this, as the group is asked to ruminate in front of the camera about their musical prospects: McCartney displays a degree of confidence about possibly continuing with Lennon as a songwriter. Lennon is less certain and suggests that it might all be over in a matter of months, if not weeks. Harrison would like three years out of it (sounding almost like an apprentice discussing the workplace) and does not appear to be enjoying it very much, whereas Starr would like to open a chain of hairdressing salons (really?). The patronising tone of the BBC commentary confirms that broadcast histories are most certainly made by broadcasters, rather than their subjects, *per se*.

Beat City

Daniel Farson was a documentary film maker who came to prominence during the 1950s and was influenced by the works of the Free Cinema movement, the preceding audiovisuals of Liverpool, and documentary-maker Denis Mitchell. Born in London in 1927, the son of an American journalist, his childhood was divided between Britain and the United States. He became a household name when, in 1955, he joined the new Associated-Rediffussion company as an interviewer, working on *This Week*. Whereas the BBC was very conservative in its approach, Farson (who perhaps felt his own degree of marginalisation via his sexuality) would tackle subjects eschewed by the BBC. He presented investigative features on 'mixed' (i.e. racially mixed) marriages, social exclusion, transvestism, and nudism. Indeed, his programme on nudism was the first time a naked woman was seen on British television. Farson also presented a more historical programme about the search for the identity of Jack the Ripper, as well as a documentary-travelogue *Farson in Australia* in which he interviewed migrants leaving the UK for a new life 'down under'.

Farson was therefore a highly regarded documentary-maker, noted for his journalistic incisiveness. Therefore the historical context of *Beat City* is not simply 'the Beatles and Merseybeat in 1963', but is actually diachronically and spatially rooted in a changing Britain: the post-war establishment, new network-based broadcasting systems, the beginnings of perhaps more realistic investigative journalism moving into TV, and the inexorable rise of popular culture from the 'bottom-up'. It should also be stated that while such images as *Beat City* can now appear stereotypes (like those of Denis Mitchell, which these days also appear somewhat politicized and discretionary), they were for many, powerful and inspirational because they expressed investigative journalism within the sceneographic matrix of the televisual. By the early-1960s television was all-conquering and without doubt a force for good, despite those who felt it was helping to dumb down the nation. However, TV did attempt (and still attempts) the impossible: to present a world which is, strictly speaking, un-presentable.

In 1963 Daniel Farson was asked by Associated-Rediffusion to write and present a documentary about an emerging Liverpool popular music scene. He contacted *Mersey Beat*'s editor Bill Harry who agreed to help in his research. Farson did not know the city of Liverpool at all and Harry was enlisted as his guide. This is extremely interesting, for the very mono-narrative upon which concepts of realism concerning Liverpool's relationship with the Beatles was, in this case, based upon guiding. The programme was not given the 'communal' thumbs-up' locally and Harry much later declared *mea culpa* for directing Farson towards the audiovisual typecasting of place that the broadcaster wished to use. All the 'correct' sceneographic ingredients are present in precise doses, and deviations from the contract were filtered out (such as the leafy suburbs to which the young Beatles actually gravitated). Perhaps the aforementioned local objections were due to the fact that *Beat City* was less an evocation and more a simulation – what might be described as an audiovisual simulacrum.

Beat City was broadcast at 9.30pm, 24th December 1963. By this time British popular music history was undergoing a major transformation: Liverpool and the Beatles had come to the fore during a year, 1963, in which Liverpool groups had outsold even Cliff Richard. In particular, via two TV entertainments shows, *Sunday Night at the London Palladium* and *The Royal Variety Performance,* the Beatles had irrevocably crossed generational and popular cultural boundaries. To Farson's credit, *Beat City* is an atmospheric portrayal of Liverpool in 1963, which attempts to put contexts behind the reasons why the Beatles and their contemporaries had happened; it also attempts to explain the localities and cultures that brought forward what is known as Merseybeat. Overall, however, it is rather less than historically successful in both respects. *Beat City* displays but perhaps dos not fully understand Liverpool's unique socio-cultural dynamics. Instead it confirms and codifies the audiovisual contract of its day, authorizing the presence of Liverpool as an oppositional 'other', from which groups such as the Beatles emerged in an organic trajectory of difference.

The opening background music for *Beat City* was the Beatles' 'There's a Place', but Farson's opening dialogue immediately insisted that the programme was not really about the Beatles, but the place and locality from which they emerged, and by

presenting such an investigation he hoped to explain the roots of the 'sound' sweeping Britain. It seems clear that Farson was already using well-worn audiovisual images in his analysis of what was going on, musically, in this urban backwater during 1963. *Beat City*'s audiovisual mapping of place was largely preoccupied with issues to do with class and regionality. Other discussions – mostly visual rather than aural – also concerned race and space. However, true to the history of such discussions within the British audiovisual industries reflecting a tendency to brush such matters under the carpet via comedic and/or masculine tropes, the very beginning of the documentary uses a singing dog. Such ironic-comedic takes are undoubtedly important elements in the ways in which both Liverpool and the Beatles were constructed out of several long-standing British audiovisual stereotypes, where the members of each class and region conform to rigid pigeonholes, displaying by means of exaggeration, the position of the observer/constructor concerning those on view. The comments attributed to comedian Ken Dodd concerning 'having to be a comedian to live in Liverpool' are also used by Farson in his commentary. He uses the phrase 'staggering vitality' to explain his thoughts on the place (Liverpool) from whence the Beatles emerged, and suggests that a new type of local fame is happening at venues in the city once home to the now largely absent Beatles. The film's editing constructs an exact singular atmosphere: musical excitement, yes but also typical bleakness. It inadvertently shows the vast amount of different genres of music available in Liverpool in 1963 and by doing so (again perhaps unwittingly) invites genre analysis, both musically and filmically. Discussions are also invited concerning the authenticity of place, and a consideration of how the media came to construct rather than simply report upon such popular music narratives.

Farson attempts to create an impression of a diverse Liverpool populous by showing the usual wastelands and ruin mixed with child poverty. He shows images of Black children and connects them to his narrative via non-diegetic folk music, reminiscent of Denis Mitchell's style of presentation. He narrates that the city is of mainly Catholic origin, illustrates conflict between religious beliefs via graffiti concerning protestant and catholic differences. He adds that Liverpool has a large 'drinking culture' (Farson later confessed his alcoholism) and that the city was almost Victorian in nature

(connoting an associated Ealing Studios-style 'Dickensian' atmosphere). It should be noted that each time a scene of poverty or 'drinking culture' is mentioned, a single policeman is shown in a background scene. This further connotes criminality prevalent in the city: subscribing to stereotypes already presented by such 1950s films as *These Dangerous Years, Violent Playground* and the more recent TV series *Z Cars*. By cutting to a folk club gathering of a drinking audience which in actual fact is very middle-class and not representative of the aforementioned stereotypes (enjoying the folk music of the Spinners at Gregson's Well pub) one begins to question the 'given' narrative that musical roots (rather than, say, routes) effectively 'led' to the Beatles. Farson, it seems, was attempting to create an atmosphere of a city that was vibrant, yet 'edgy': socially deprived. Yet this atmosphere was fabricated from a diverse landscape of characters, musical tastes, racial integration, religious differences, and political upheavals (together with underlying drinking culture that somehow fed the creativity of the city). All such points ask us to consider how and why Farson intended to show any city in this way.

In *Beat City*, place signifies 'rootedness' as utterly authentic. From a social realist perspective one can see that Farson wished to subscribe to a set of audiovisual tropes of locality-based belief systems inherent in the ideology of realism at that time: 'working-class', regional, under-privileged, under-resourced, 'other', different, etc. (despite the Beatles not actually replicating that stereotype). In this way place is awarded an overtly political dimension, becoming a site for struggle that it is proposed inspires both the music and the representations of the music within this documentary. One might argue that this is a trait also borrowed from the contemporary British folk scene, where it was also taken for granted that music as protest rises from suppression. Farson's idea is that in Liverpool the ordinary working man's struggles against society and his subtle awareness of space has given rise to a radical openness in music. Yet the real (rather than rhetoric) evidence for this is non-existent and the 'knowing of one's place' is never convincingly displayed. In fact, Liverpool appears merely a jumble of twisted unexplained spatialities. Farson leaves us with a piece of work that is not simply reportage but is an active agent in the creation of the mythology of Merseybeat and the Beatles. This is because underlying several of these

rhetorical tropes used by Farson is the unidirectional assumption that locality translates into community, and community into music. However, it is clear that we are watching several disparate communities, rather than one and that popular music meanings are far more complex to locate.

For example, via descriptive terminology from the narrator, the viewer is asked to consider a 'typical Liverpool scene'. We meet two entertainers singing an Irish song ('The Brothers Malone') to a handful of drunken regulars before they sing an equally drunken and rambling version of Jim Reeves' 'Welcome to My World' (oddly, Farson does not comment on the popularity of country music in Liverpool). All of this is, of course, a classic audiovisual set-up; however (as with, perhaps, his 'free cinema' forebears) Farson gives the viewer the impression that one has just stepped into such an event. Further, the concomitant visual framing of the waterside scene of people struggling against both river and weather contributes to a required prescriptive constituent of 'social realism': we are actually witnessing a typical stereotype employed by most social realists of the day: meaning is translated to an 'elemental' struggle. Further images appear: docks, railway lines, alleys, cobbled streets with a slowly moving horse and cart, and all these suggest a typical monochrome day beside the Mersey – but in which century, exactly? While Farson was valiantly attempting to link locality to music, and suggest connections between audiences, musicians, and infrastructure, his work merely serves as critical shorthand resting upon a set of predisposed ideological and visual judgments. These are not just judgments about the sound and its connections to the place and its politics, but also the media genre of social realism and documentary-making. While the effort is to amplify lived experiences, we end up with an amplification of the figurative. Instead of the real, we have the indexical. Instead of reflecting a basic reality we have the absence of one. There is nothing on view which marks any decisive turning point in the history of popular music in Liverpool. We are not even dealing with statements which can be deemed true or false in this documentary, we are instead faced with evaluations which can be found to be visually more or less plausible.

So, one question we are faced after watching Farson's *Beat City* is whether it is legitimate for a researcher such as Farson to film first and ask questions later; furthermore, whether locality shapes the business of producing and consuming popular music– if so, how? Additionally, what were the local conditions, as appeared in *Beat City* and how did they assist making or creating the music? We not only witness stereotypes, but also believe in their immediacy. Paradoxically, the genuinely different or 'other' can perhaps never be identified as such until time has passed to allow for the verification of its 'otherness'. We might, therefore, argue that Farson used all the media tools available to him to construct an *a priori* document compressing a complex discussion. But he also perhaps missed the point. Liverpool, like all cities (then and now) is not really rooted musically at all, for music scenes do not necessarily interweave, and are usually pluralistic. All we end-up watching is a series of dimly lit monochrome lantern slides for our edification; *a priori* in construction yet *post facto* in representation (following the explosion of the Beatles and their national success).
Yet, what was filmed has left a permanent image of how Liverpool came to be stereotyped in a 'social realist' way in 1963. Farson should be thanked for leaving with us a document which assumes preceding filmic and televisual examples. However, such representations demonstrate that having a significant number of affective tropes in prominent visual positions can historically 'place' events into a prescription, while offering definitions that almost immediately become stereotypes of the 'other'. But the speed by which such apparent 'otherness' was acknowledged during 1963 and 1964 should make us wary of any actual difference, for there are always political dimensions to timely mediations: in popular music we seldom witness the beginnings of anything new or the end of anything old.

Summary

These few examples of key pieces of audiovisual information suggest to popular music and popular film researchers that the history of the representation of Liverpool leading up to the emergence of the Beatles is extremely complex, yet vital to record. All such developments are of course contextual and could not have taken place at any other time in the city's history, for they have materialised as a consequence of myriad

specific characters and considerations of local places that embrace very different mindsets concerning culture, the popular, and how it can be re-presented and articulated. Such images undoubtedly led to the creation of a 'fourth estate' of cultural capital concerning the city. The legitimisation of inequality in cultural capital occurs in a manner that is highly distinct from simply legitimisation though economic inequality. Despite the fact that cultural capital is acquired in the home and the school via exposure to a given set of cultural practices, and therefore has a social origin, it is liable to produce legitimacies via stereotypes: perceptions of 'talent', its beholders as 'gifted', as a result of the fact that it is embodied in particular individuals from particular places. So as the locality helps to define so-called 'inherited' cultural capital into 'localised' cultural capital, the latter is predisposed to be interpreted as a place-specific 'achievement'. Liverpool and Liverpudlians are therefore granted a 'special' status via formulaic means of discernment provided by that 'fourth estate'.

In the wake of the advent of the Beatles in 1963, Liverpool is thus regarded as a prescribed 'special' place; after all, the Beatles are self-evidently 'special', having seemingly risen through the ranks of what appear to be 'appropriate' experiences within this specific locality, and according to the matrix of the audiovisual contract. But if this presumed continuum was merely a distortion, then what we have is a fragmented narrative already broken by the non-relationship between many Liverpudlians and the Beatles (for some, the group have forever represented desertion). Actually, this disappearance permeates *Beat City*. One young woman states 'we never see them now' and everyday life in Liverpool following their 'advent' facilitated a narrative of absence to emerge, increasingly influencing not only the way people saw Liverpool, but also the way certain Liverpudlians saw themselves – a procession of simulacra emerged and the 'history of the Beatles' began. The inarticulate stereotype is clear: Liverpool is viewed as a city which stretches people's imaginations and critical sensibilities and creates space for those who feel that they must express themselves past the point of toleration. Liverpool is a place, it seems, where new tactics and strategies have come into being which draw upon not only a radical tradition, but new ways of transmitting ideology. One wonders these days whether either the Beatles or indeed the many thousands of Liverpudlians supposedly

'left behind' actually recognized themselves in such mono-representations. Perhaps ironically these images rang far more familiar to those across the country who recognized them by virtue of the preceding audiovisual contract.

There are perhaps two linked conclusions one might draw concerning how the audiovisual contract came to cement British views of Liverpool and 'its music' for generations to come. The first is to consider that, via the onset of post-WWII British media, a whole battery of signs began to be assembled relating to officially sanctioned contemporary images stylized by British film studios such as Ealing. This scripting of our society served at once to suggest to the spectator that there were appropriate modes of reception of such signs. At the same time, a somewhat different play of connotations came to be activated by complex allusions to social realism. Although Daniel Farson was part of a new generation of documentary journalists with a status markedly different from those preceding, he continued to project his ideas through, and by way of, well known ideas, conventions and images reflecting the vertical integration of British media forms and society. To a degree he connoted rebellion and non-conformity, but he also assured the conventional functions of the audiovisual contract by strategically framing settings which did not have to appeal to great ideals, passions or abnegations. In this way he served as yet another connotator concerning Liverpool, thus making it possible for us to receive a narrative of solidification. Farson, as the active agent of disparate factors, rather than the presenter of a language of the pastiche of the stereotypical past, came to bestow upon us an over-image of a grainy mirage; it was the mirage, rather than the reality, which endured.

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