



“So far I’ve been in a train and a room and a car and a room and a room and a room”. Reading The Beatles’ celebrity through *A Hard Day’s Night*.

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Abstract

“The images persist: four guys in suits or smart raincoats being chased by hundreds of fans, girls frenzied at their merest glimpse, sloping bobbies-arms linked, teeth gritted, straining to hold back the throng.”

Mark Lewisohn’s (2002) evocative description of one of the key images of the 1960s helps to focus attention on the phenomenon that was Beatlemania. Beatlemania remains, this paper will argue, the celebrity yardstick: an alliance between fans, the media and a cultural phenomenon unlike any other in UK pop history. The paper will argue that it is through Beatlemania that The Beatles were established as a global entity and that all that followed - their transgression of traditional expectations about the role of the male pop star, their role as men of ideas, their impact on the cultural landscape of the 1960s and their symbiotic relationship with the decade-stems from this.

The paper will explore the nature of Beatlemania in an attempt to explain why it remains the ultimate expression of celebrity. This includes discussion of the relationship between the Beatles and their fans, their appeal in terms of gender fluidity, early song lyrics as a form of communication with fans, the influence of 1960s’ girl groups and manager and mentor Brian Epstein’s role in creating a fan-friendly “product”.

The paper will use examples from the Beatles’ first feature film *A Hard Day’s Night* (1964) as a text through which to read both the joys and trappings of quasi-religious fan worship.

Introduction

Rojek (2001) from his 21st century vantage point, characterizes the rise of the modern celebrity as a symptom of “a society that cultivates personal style as the antidote to formal democratic equality” (Rojek, 2001:9).

He argues that it is the democratization of society, the decline in organized religion and the commodification of everyday life that has led to the predominance of “the ideology of the common man” (Rojek, 2001:13), the process by which the ordinary becomes extraordinary.

At the time of its publication, Rojek’s (2001) modern-day celebrity found a focus in the cultural phenomena that was, and is, David Beckham. The structuralist arguments, characterized by the work of the Frankfurt School (Strinati, 1995), about the role of fame and celebrity in society and the post-structuralist arguments which see a central role for codes of representation (Dyer, 1993) will be explored here in relation to the phenomena of Beatles. Gamson’s (1994) ideas on the 19th century celebrity as a new mass phenomena and Rojek’s (2001) notions of the celebrity as cultural fabrication with mass media central to the formation of celebrity culture can be seen at work in the early 1960s, a period of development of global mass media and the commodification of the newly created youth culture (Sandbrook, 2005).

Marshall (1997) observes that the modern celebrity is a key role of media attention and argues that the mid to late 20th century saw the growth of popular music as one of the key sites where this plays out. Developments in technology, the growth of the recording industry, the growth in size of concert venues and the segmentation of the mass market has led to the commodification of the music industry, based around the key concepts of recorded work as product, youth as a category and style as authenticity. Live music (the concert) is central to this process and Marshall (1997:159) sees the concert as “a form of ritualized authentication of pleasure and meaning of the records through a ‘lived experience’”. Rojek (2001:47) sees “abstract desire” as central to the audiences relationship to the celebrity with the mass media having a central role in orchestrating this.

These are just some of the ideas, then, that will be explored in relation to the Beatles and the phenomena of Beatlemania, with a particular focus on the representation of their celebrity through their first feature film, *A Hard Day’s Night* (Lester, 1964). Rojek (2001) draws a distinction between celebrity based on glamour and celebrity based on notoriety. Beatlemania represents a glamorous rather than a notorious phase of the Beatles’ career, but the complexity at work in the celebrity bestowed by Beatlemania and revealed in *A Hard Day’s Night* (Lester, 1964) will be explored here in relation to particular social developments in the early 1960s in the UK.

Beatlemania

Hysterical scenes had surrounded male stars before the Beatles (Valentino in the 1920s, Frank Sinatra in the 1940s, and Elvis and Johnny Ray in the 1950s) and has done subsequently (the Monkees in the late 1960s, the Osmonds and the Bay City Rollers in the 1970s, Take That and Boyzone in the 1990s, One Direction more recently). However, Beatlemania remains the yardstick, an alliance between the media, fans and a cultural phenomenon unlike any other. ‘In the beginning there was the scream’ states Stark (2005: 10), and he goes on to claim that the screams that had greeted Frank and Elvis seemed to increase fourfold for the Beatles. Sweeney (1993:1) asks the question “what disease of adolescent females is characterized by communal screaming, running, crying, fainting, fetishistic obsessions and masturbatory displays, the symptoms of which are brought on by the sound, sight or mere mention of four shaggy lads from Liverpool?”. Marshall (2000) sees the beginnings of Beatlemania as the shaping of modern celebrity, a presentation of self and image for public consumption that went beyond what had gone before.

In 1963, the Beatles had four number one singles, two number one albums, a 13-week BBC radio series (*Pop Goes The Beatles*) and had toured the UK four times. Perhaps, as some have argued, they were the right men in the right place at the right time given the social changes of the early 1960s (Sandbrook, 2006), particularly the emerging discourse of the new classes society in which intellectual activity would not be confined to one particular grouping (Mannheim, 1960).

Their supposed status as four working class lads from Liverpool, a well-worn rags-to-riches narrative beloved by the media, was central to Beatlemania, and their youth and exuberance fitted well with the classless society discourse at work in the early 1960s (Marwick, 1998; Sandbrook, 2005; 2006). Marshall (2000: 163) talks about the “pleasures of personality” at work within the Beatles and the way that this was portrayed through the new global medium of TV in particular (although their films also provided a vehicle for this). The pleasure discourse is something that recurs in discussion of the Beatles. Marshall also sees Beatlemania as providing a link between fame and the artistic process, “a re-reading of the cultural value of fame and celebrity” (Marshall, 2000: 170), as well as an event that united artist and fan through the phenomenon of hysteria linked to live performance. As the psychologist E.E. Sampson (1988: 5) has stated, “the reactions of others are required for us to be”, and Beatlemania was very much a phenomenon about the reactions of others, based on a relationship between the Beatles and their fans which was then fed back to all through the mass media. This phenomenon was populated predominantly by female fans and often, therefore, seen as feminised in itself, and linked through the disciplines of crowd theory and social psychology to weakness in the female constitution (Marshall, 2000). This is perhaps most famously illustrated by Paul Johnson’s (1964) “The Menace of Beatlism” in the *New Statesman*, a stinging attack on the “bottomless chasm of vacuity” (Johnson, 2006: 53) at work in Beatlemania. This quote gives a flavour of the piece:

“Those who flock round the Beatles, who scream themselves into hysteria, whose vacant faces flicker over the TV screen, are the least fortunate of their generation, the dull, the idle, the failures.”

(Johnson, 2006: 54–5)

However, as a new phenomenon, the Beatles, with their youthful exuberance and wit, were well suited to the needs of the tabloid press and, thus, the phenomenon grew. The term “Beatlemania”, coined by the Fleet Street Press in the UK (initially *The Daily Mirror*) is generally accepted to have come to full fruition following the group’s appearance at the Royal Variety Performance in November 1963 (Gray, 1963; Ellen, 2002; Lewisohn, 2002). Norman (1981) has challenged the idea that Beatlemania somehow gripped the nation overnight, advancing the alternative view that an alliance of Fleet Street and the Beatles’ rapid rise in popularity in 1963 ensured their household name status. In the week following the Royal Variety Performance, *The Daily Express* ran five front page stories on Beatlemania, and *The Daily Mail* began to use a logo comprised of four fringed heads rather than the words “the Beatles” (Norman, 1981).

By the following year, George Harrison (or, rather, his ghostwriter) was sending back a regular column for *The Daily Express* from wherever their world tour had taken them. It was their first visit to the US in 1964, however, that made Beatlemania a global phenomenon, given the cultural positioning of the US and its global media networks, which were more fully developed than those in the UK (Sandbrook, 2006). Highly successful British acts had not made the crossover to the States and the group, beginning to recognise their own power, had refused to go until they had a hit single there (The Beatles, 2000). The scene that greeted their arrival at JFK Airport in February 1964 has been seen many times over (The Beatles, 2003). McKinney (2003) comments on the now familiar “British Invasion” discourse, with the male reporters of the day using war-like metaphors such as “conquer”, “invade”, etc. so often used to describe anything from financial takeover to sporting events, imbued as they are with the concept of masculinism (Brittan, 1989). Beatlemania’s appearance in the US can equally be read as seduction, but it’s sociological significance extends to gender, generation, class and race.

Beatlemania as phenomena is generally understood as a coming together of the Beatles, their audience and the popular media at a particular historical moment (Norman, 1981), when development in mass communication saw the first stirrings of McLuhan’s (1964) global village. In addition, it is a phenomena that takes place in the context of a period of social change for men (King, 2013), what Ehrenreich (1983) has termed the male revolt, when challenges to traditional ideas about men and masculinity were beginning to be reflected in film and TV texts (Spicer, 1997; King, 2013).

Sweeney (1993:1) explores the idea of the Beatles as teen idols and states:

“Idols... are more unstable masculine figures because they, unlike stars, depend on the gaze of women. Their masculinity is troubled, often feminized, their roles problematic, their attitudes verging on camp.”

Their representation of a version of masculinity that was resistant to the norm and their playing with gender roles through visual appearance is discussed later in relation to *A Hard Day’s Night* (1964), as is their retrospective characterisation as four different aspects of masculinity: the narcissistic Paul “with his baby eyes and baby face” (McKinney, 2003: 323), the acerbic and intellectual Lennon (Goldman, 1988), George as spiritual and inward looking (MacDonald, 2003) and Ringo, the ordinary one (Melly, 1970; Stark, 2005).

Gender Fluidity

Pop music, particularly as it transmogrified into rock music in the late 1960s, is often characterised as a male domain (Cohen, 1997; Bannister, 2000) where gender roles are clearly defined within the music ‘scene’ and rock music, in particular, is produced as male, with men taking the leading role in performing, management and the organisation of ‘the scene’ (Cohen, 1997) while the traditional role of spectator (or even groupie) is assigned to women. It is against this backdrop that the Beatles’ ability to shock through their resistance to formal representations of masculinity is juxtaposed.

Many commentators have discussed the Beatles’ challenge to traditional sex and gender roles. Ehrenreich et al. (1992: 535) describe the Beatles’ appeal to early 1960s’ America as being centred on their representations of gender fluidity, claiming that “the group mocked the distinctions that bifurcated the American landscape into ‘his’ and ‘hers’”. Their lack of connection to the groin-centred rock that came before (Elvis) and afterwards (1970s’ heavy metal) also provides a challenge to the usual masculine discourses at work in the industry. Cuva (2009) also sees Beatlemania as a

stage in women finding a voice in the early 1960s, rooted, as it was in popular culture as opposed to the traditional political sphere.

Their female audience, it is argued, formed a connection to them as fans, forming themselves into a fan club on a global scale (Mäkelä, 2004; Stark, 2005). The relationship with the fan club was unique, with the Beatles producing and performing Christmas shows and producing flexi-disc Christmas records containing messages to the fans, all included in the price of fan club membership (McKinney, 2003).

There were, then, a number of other ways in which they related to the female audience which contribute to the idea of gender fluidity, a predominant feature of their early image. Stark (2005: 133) sees them as “more feminine in their group dynamic” due to both their lack of a macho-style leader and Lennon and McCartney’s collaborative writing style, particularly in the early stages. A number of their early songs are written from a female point of view (Whitley, 2000; Stark, 2005) with lyrics that suggest vulnerability and an indication that they felt the same way as the fans (Stark, 2005). Many of the songs on their first album can be interpreted this way. Their refusal to change the lyrics to the song *Boys* (1963), for example, a song originally recorded by an American female group vocal (Bannister, 2000), makes it sound as if it is a man singing to and about other men. In *A Hard Day’s Night* (Lester, 1964), Lennon sings the opening lines “If I fell in love with you / Would you promise to be true” directly to Ringo, one of the many “queer” moments in this text. *She Loves You* (1963) has an unusual (for the time) third-person lyric, which is essentially a dialogue between two men discussing a relationship, something which would have been seen as much more of a female activity. ‘Apologise to her’ goes the caring refrain. This is a long way from groin-centred rock (Stark, 2005). Other early songs such as *From Me to You/Thank You Girl* (1963), their second single, seem to communicate directly to the fans. A lot of the early compositions draw on traditional boy meets girl scenarios, but these examples illustrate the ways in which a certain gender fluidity is at work. Bannister (2000) also notes that some of Lennon’s early compositions, for example *No Reply* (1964) and *Ticket to Ride* (1965) are written from the perspective of abandonment, what Bannister (2000) claims is a feminised position, influenced by the work of Roy Orbison.

In this sense they provide a good example of Mäkelä’s (2004: 65) claim that pop stars “ought to be situated in a continuing and shifting cultural debate about gender and sexuality”, playing with gender being “an essential part of the group”.

An affinity for, and an identification with, American female vocal groups can also be seen as adding to the Beatles’ early non-macho persona. Seemingly unworried by a friend’s comment that singing in question-and-answer phrasing and falsetto voices made them sound like “a bunch of poofs” (Stark, 2005: 26), the Beatles pursued a “cuddly androgyny” (Stark, 2005: 130) by covering five songs by American girl groups on their first two albums. Producer George Martin actually described them to Liverpool’s *Mersey Beat* in 1963 as sounding like ‘a male Shirelles’ (Stark, 2005: 131), and Warwick (2000: 162) identifies “girl-groupisms in the Beatles’ oeuvre” as being important to their early sound. These “girl-groupisms” (Warwick, 2000: 162) include vocal style, phrasing, harmonies and falsetto backing vocals – the “oohs” in *She Loves You* (1963) are a good example (Ellen, 2002a). Their matching outfits, in their early period reflected in *A Hard Day’s Night* (Lester, 1964), can also be seen as a link to the girl-groups. The fact that female fans responded positively to this anti-masculinist (Brittan, 1989) presentation is particularly interesting and indicates, as suggested by Ehrenreich et al. (1992) that this was part of their appeal.

Bannister (2000: 169) argues that “by singing songs originally sung by women, they occupied a number of highly ambivalent subject positions, especially in terms of gender”. This is not to say, for example, that Lennon always wrote from a feminised position. A song like *Run For Your Life* (1965), for example, can be read as misogynistic, and *A Hard Day’s Night* (Lester, 1964) is written from a traditional male perspective: working man returning home to woman waiting for him. However, it is the shifting between these positions that means their early work, in particular, reflects an unusual gender fluidity, which, because of its appeal to the female audience, is central to their celebrity.

USA 1964

Two appearances on the *Ed Sullivan Show* and appearances at the Washington Coliseum and Carnegie Hall, all within a short period of time, established their celebrity in the US, achieving “an intimacy and ease with their audience unlike anything that existed before them, unlike anything that exists today” (McKinney, 2003: 56). Manager Brian Epstein described their initial press conference in the US as the turning point in their career (Godley et al., 2003), a chance for a wider audience to see the gang at play, announcing their Liverpool-ness to the world (Stark, 2005; Gould, 2008) and engaging in witty banter previously unknown in pop performers.

Footage from *The Beatles Anthology* DVD (Godley et al., 2003) shows a pack of reporters clamouring for pictures and what would now be called sound bites from the group:

Q – Are you all bald under those wigs?

John – We’re all bald and deaf and dumb too.

Q – Are you guys going to get a haircut at all?

George – I had one yesterday.

Q – Why does it [the music] excite them so much?

Paul – We don’t know.

John – If we did we’d form another group and be managers.

Q – Will you sing?

John – We need money first.

The beginnings of the ordinary yet extraordinary status bestowed on the Beatles by the Beatlemania phenomenon is apparent in these early press conferences (Hutchins, 1964). Their quintessentially English sense of humour, Liverpool’s comic tradition and the Beatles’ links to the British satire movement are well documented by Mäkelä (2004). The mockery and spoofing of questions and questioner at work in these events, as well as being seen as a natural element of the Beatles, is also an early indication of a subversive reading through which an anti-establishment stance was consciously produced, often through the use of humour in saying the unsayable.

Therefore, the Beatles' celebrity and popularity enabled them to express new ideas, challenging the old order as high-profile spokesmen for a burgeoning "movement". Coser (1965) draws parallels between the new intellectual elite of the 1960s and the court jester of medieval times; a role which allowed for the subversion and ridiculing of the established order of the times despite the lowly status of the jester:

"Among the intellectuals' ancestors we may also reckon the medieval court jester. The role of the jester ... was to play none of the expected roles. He had the extraordinary privilege of dispersing with adherence to the usual proprieties because he was outside the social hierarchy ..."

(Coser, 1965: ix)

Thus, the Beatles' later celebrity status, as men of ideas (Inglis, 2000) and the spokesmen for a generation discourse which would emerge later in the 1960s, is rooted in the more traditional celebrity status of their Beatlemania period. The quasi-religious nature of Beatlemania has been well documented (McKinney, 2003; Stark, 2005; King, 2013) and again, the "bigger than Jesus" debate that would engulf them in 1966 is rooted in the global fame and celebrity established through Beatlemania. It can be argued that there is a quasi-religious aura to all fan worship (Lewis, 1992). However, McKinney (2003) gives a number of examples to illustrate the way in which Beatle worship seemed to take this a stage further. The bringing of disabled fans ('the cripples', as Lennon liked to call them) to touch the Beatles on early tours (The Beatles, 2000; McKinney, 2003), for example. McKinney (2003:143) goes as far as to argue that "the Beatles became a religion..... at Beatle concerts ... kids found a community of worship".

Adler's (1964) *Love Letters to the Beatles* provides fascinating reading as a collection of fan letters both personal and published, and adds further weight to the argument. The Beatles' "message" of peace and love which emerged post *Sgt Pepper* (1967) did have a quasi-religious quality, while Mäkelä (2004) argues a strong case for reading Lennon's death as a kind of martyrdom which was compared to those of political and religious leaders (rather than other entertainers) and that the mourning was interpreted as a mourning for the values that the Beatles had seemed to represent.

It was following their first trip to the USA in 1964 that work began on the first Beatles feature film *A Hard Day's Night* (Lester, 1964). Originally titled *Beatlemania* (Carr, 1996; Neaverson, 1997), the film set out to capture the phenomenon, a representation of the Beatles' real lives made into fantasy and fed back into the phenomenon itself via the global medium of cinema. The Beatles' perceived humour and youthful exuberance were at the heart of *A Hard Day's Night* (Lester, 1964), while comparisons with the Marx Brothers (Norman, 1981; The Beatles, 2000; Stark, 2005) only emphasised the subversive nature of their humour and jesting.

It's Been a Hard Day's Night and I've Been Working Like a Dog

A Hard Day's Night (Lester, 1964) is the first of a four-film deal that manager Brian Epstein negotiated for the Beatles with United Artists. Their initial interest in the film was mainly to cash in on a soundtrack album as Beatlemania gripped the UK and USA in early 1964. Because of the healthy state of the British film industry in the early 1960s many US companies, including United Artists, had set up production units in the UK. Producer Walter Shenson had never heard of the Beatles but was won over by their natural charm and charisma on meeting them (Murray, 2002) and proposed a semi-documentary film based on a day in the lives of the Beatles, with the group playing themselves (or rather, a representation of themselves).

Famously described on its release as "the Citizen Kane of Jukebox movies" by Andrew Sarris in his review in *The Village Voice* in 1964 (Sarris, 2006: 56), the film has, in retrospect, been viewed as something beyond the usual attempts to exploit the latest pop sensation via celluloid. Agajanian (2000: 91) describes it as "nothing like any previous musical, British or American" in her essay on the film in *Windows on the Sixties* (Aldgate et al., 2000), a collection which uses a number of texts to examine some of the social and cultural changes of the 1960s. Agajanian (2000) argues that *A Hard Day's Night* (Lester, 1964) should be viewed as a key 1960s' cultural text for a number of reasons, including the circumstances of its production, which reflected a change in the creative process within the music industry at this time, the combination of the musical/documentary genres within the film, the content – which raises issues about celebrity, class, age and gender – and its economic and cultural significance in US/UK relations.

A Day In The Life

Shenson hired a fellow American, Richard Lester, to direct the film. Lester won the Beatles' approval because of his previous work with the Goons. Welsh playwright Alun Owen was engaged to write a script and he spent time with the group on a trip to Paris as research and to try and write some of the Beatles' already famous wit and personality into the script. The film's *cinéma-vérité* credentials are boosted by the fact that shooting (on a budget of £200,000) began in March 1964 and the film premiered in London on 6 July with Royalty in attendance amidst further scenes of Beatlemania akin to those evident within the film. The film's original title was, in fact, *Beatlemania*, until one of Ringo Starr's malapropisms was used instead. Walker (1991: 489) in *Halliwel's Film Guide* describes the film as "a sweet breath of fresh air" and sees it as a precursor to the swinging-sixties London spy thrillers and comedies. The film itself is a representation of the Beatles on tour at the height of Beatlemania. A sanitised version of the Beatles as themselves – they are called John, Paul, George and Ringo but never referred to as the Beatles, although the name appears on the drum kit, in neon lights during their final theatre performance, and on the helicopter that whisks them away at the end of the film.

New Musical Express journalist Charles Shaar Murray described it as a:

"mock-doc feel with outbreaks of surrealism ... The plot is a real back of the envelope job. The Beatles arrive in London by train with their road managers Norm (Norman Rossington) and Shake (John Junkin) as well as Paul's (fictional) granddad Johnny McCartney (Wilfred Brambell) to hold a press conference and perform a live transmission TV concert from what is, presumably, the BBC. Granddad winds Ringo up to the point where he walks out on the band shortly before transmission. The others have to find him in time and get him back to the studio in time to play the gig. They do it. That's it."

(Murray, 2002: 116)

The film has been described as a sort of comic-strip version of the Beatles (The Beatles, 2000), with often-repeated

references to the Marx Brothers (Norman, 1981; Stark, 2005). It can, however, be read as a cleaned-up version of celebrity reality, the loveable mop-tops as people wanted them to be:

“There’s no shagging or drugging in *A Hard Day’s Night*, but the Beatles smoke lots of ciggies and letch after schoolgirls.”

(Murray, 2002: 116)

The Beatles’ manager Brian Epstein was careful not to allow references to the Beatles’ girls, or any unwholesome habits like drinking, or taking drugs, lest it damage that image. Even when Lennon suggestively sniffs a Coke bottle it is done as a joke and ignored by the rest, being treated as just one of the many incidents of the Beatles’ fooling around. Agajanian (2000) sees this scene as having slipped under the censor’s radar and a glimpse into the reality of a day in the life of the touring Beatles. Lennon has likened the early tours to something closer to Fellini’s *Satyricon* than *A Hard Day’s Night* (Lester, 1964) [Miles, 2002].

Richard Lester’s love of French new wave cinema (Neaverson, 1997; Murray, 2002) and his admiration for artists such as Jacques Tati give the film a visual gravitas and an artistic discourse beyond that of the standard British pop film of the time (Agajanian, 2000). Murray (2002: 2) describes this as “matching the Beatles’ exuberant music to wild impressionistic visuals” with “exhilarative” results. The film draws on a number of influences, linking a dialogue-based, play-like script with jump-cut photography and hand-held camera work used in the documentary film-making genre and the French new wave. The fact that the film was in black and white, while a result of United Artists’ financial expediency, also linked it to these genres. Agajanian (2000) sees the film as being indebted to the British documentary movement, particularly to the “free cinema” realist tradition of the mid 1950s and the British New Wave films of 1959–1963, which featured black and white stories of working class life. Richards (1992) sees these films as part of an emergent post-war social upheaval linked to working-class affluence, an increasing emphasis on ‘youth’ and the emergence of left-wing intellectuals as some kind of movement.

The genre, script and overall mood of *A Hard Day’s Night* (Lester, 1964) encompasses this feeling, with the Beatles as young, upwardly mobile men presented as the antithesis of the outdated values, discipline and restriction referred to by Richards (1992). They are the new celebrity class based on talent, part of the new meritocracy discourse of the 1960s (Sandbrook, 2006). The film provides a documentation of their journey from the North to the South, both literally and metaphorically. Stafford (2001: 1) cites *Billy Liar* (Schlesinger, 1963) as a defining moment for the birth of the ‘swinging sixties’. At the end of the film Billy (Tom Courtney) is offered the chance to go down to London with Liz (Julie Christie as ‘60s’ “free spirit”) to pursue his dream of being a scriptwriter. “Billy chickens out at the last moment but Liz goes South and with her goes the focus of British cinema in the mid sixties” (Stafford, 2001: 1).

Run For Your Life

One of the key discourses at work in many of the British New Wave films of the early 1960s is one which reflects Ehrenreich’s (1983) flight from commitment and an increasing frustration around the trappings of hegemonic masculinity (Carrigan et al., 1985; Connell, 1995; Hearn, 2004) and the expectations of fulfilment of the male role (Segal, 1988).

A Hard Day’s Night (Lester, 1964) has much in common with the New Wave 1960s’ ‘kitchen sink’ dramas, particularly *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1960), *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (Richardson, 1961) and *Life At The Top* (Kotcheff, 1965), in that discourses around containment, imprisonment and the need and desire of men to break out are at work in all of these films. This is particularly interesting in the context of their celebrity status. As Piotrowski (2008) notes, the film starts with their fame already established, thus eschewing the rages to riches narrative of much Hollywood cinema. The drawing of inside/outside distinctions (Petersen, 1998: 21) is also a common theme. Hearn (1992: 194) describes how male stars in the Hollywood system “had a vast array of social and technological inventions to play with and within”. He cites the car, the train, the gang and the posse as a series of props through which traditional masculinity could be played out. In *A Hard Day’s Night* (Lester, 1964) these “boys’ toys” serve to contain and imprison the main male characters. The film has twin themes of running and escape which are at odds with the traditional male star’s central role and direction of events and narrative (Hearn, 1992). In the opening scene of the film the Beatles are seen running away from female fans. McKinney (2003: 64) describes the fans as ‘a rolling wave or flying wedge forever haunting the streets outside’. They run into ever decreasing spaces: the street, the alley, the photo booth, the telephone box and the train compartment, all within the opening three minutes (McKinney, 2003). In describing the Beatles’ enclosed existence, (Norman, 1981: 251) states:

“It was the year they conquered the world but did not see it. For them the world shrank to a single dressing room ... one more stage, one more limo, one more run for your life.”

This is summed up in the film by Paul’s mythical grandfather, as outside observer of the Beatlemania phenomenon, when he complains about the lack of excitement and claustrophobic nature of the trip they have taken him on: “so far I’ve been in a train and a room and a car and a room and a room and a room”. It is a film about the most famous men in the world but the discourse of work and resultant imprisonment/ trappings looms large. “I’m feeling decidedly straightjacketed” observes Paul’s grandfather. There is a clue in the opening title song: “It’s been a hard day’s night / and I’ve been working like a dog.” They are like Albert Finney in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (Reisz, 1960), trapped by the monotony of a ‘man’s job’ in a factory, or Laurence Harvey in *Life at the Top* (Kotcheff, 1965), imprisoned by the upwardly mobile existence he wished for himself, escaping from his working-class roots only to find that the life of a middle-class male executive is no better. *A Hard Day’s Night* (Lester, 1964) sees the Beatles, having played a TV show, heading for a midnight show in Wolverhampton. Segal (1988) documents how women represent a threat in these films, a representation of the trap of marriage and domesticity, and the Beatles’ constant fleeing from their screaming fans in *A Hard Day’s Night* (Lester, 1964) can be read similarly.

The film contains many scenes of running – to escape from the fans in the opening scene, from the train to the limo, from the limo to the theatre, later running through the streets of London searching for a missing Ringo. The scene in which they break out, cutting rehearsals by running down a fire escape and later running around in a field, signifies a brief escape, the gang at play. Set to a sound track of “Can’t Buy Me Love” (1964), this scene is considered to be the

birth of the pop video. Again this juxtaposition of inside/outside (Petersen, 1998) represents escape from the trappings of responsibility, like Albert Finney leaving the factory for a night 'out', or Tom Courtenay in *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (Richardson, 1962). Courtenay, as a borstal boy, uses long-distance running as both a means and a symbol of escape from his hemmed-in Borstal existence and his previous working-class life of crime. Controlled by hegemonic masculinity (Carrigan et al., 1985; Connell, 1995; Hearn, 2004) in the form of the prison governor, the culture of masculinism (Brittan, 1989) within the Borstal, and an overbearing mother (Segal, 1988), the outdoors represents freedom and escape. This discourse of inside bad/outside good runs throughout *A Hard Day's Night* (Lester, 1964), a film McKinney (2003: 59) sees as being "preoccupied with bare white bulbs and imprisonment". Lester's hand-held camera technique and choice of enclosed locations creates a *mise en scène* consistent with the discourse. The Beatles' minders "Norm" and "Shake", older men (and representations of real-life minders Neil Aspinall and Mal Evans) constantly attempt to engage the group ("If you don't need them I'll lock them up in the dressing room" Norm tells the TV producer). Norm, in particular, acts as a surrogate parent to a gang of naughty boys, forbidding them to go to a club or even leave the building, something which they were to experience increasingly as Beatlemania took hold in the UK and US (Anon, 1965). Agajanian et al. (2000:162) state:

"...it is the adults – the traveller, the manager, the director, the groundsman and the policeman – who consistently place obstacles in the way of the Beatles having fun."

Despite their extraordinary celebrity status as famous men, the Beatles in *A Hard Day's Night* (Lester, 1964) appear like the ordinary men in the Northern New Wave films: trapped by, but railing against, their role in the production process and traditional expectations of them as men.

There are points in the film where they seek to escape their public image, the "monster beyond their control" (Rolston and Murray, 2001:40). In the opening scene of the film the Beatles are seen running from their female fans, hiding in photobooths and behind newspapers, even false beards. Later Lennon, Harrison and Starr have solo scenes in which their celebrity is not recognized and they step outside of it for a short period. Lennon has an interesting scene with a female actress in the theatre where they are performing, where flirtatious games around identity and image are played out ("wait a minute – you look like him"). The scene ends with the actress concluding "You don't look like him at all". As Rolston and Murray (2001:40) note: "He may fear the curse of celebrity identity, but wouldn't like entirely to lose it".

George Harrison's scene is a satire on youth culture. He wanders into a production office in the TV studio and is mistaken for "an approximation of his own image" (Rolston and Murray, 2001:40) rather than the real thing and is ejected when he challenges the producers' views on the commodification of youth culture, a scene in which the manufactured nature of the Beatles' celebrity is recognized and foregrounded.

Ringo Starr plays truant from the Beatles' phenomena in his "lonely man" scene, where he wanders off alone and masks his identity by buying a coat and hat from a junk shop. He can then pass unrecognized in "ordinary" locations - the street, the pub, by a canal, a building site.

This discarding of their celebrity persona can also be seen in the final scene when grandfather's signed photographs are thrown out of the helicopter that takes them away. Again, the quasi-religious nature of the Beatles' celebrity is emphasized, as they ascend to a high place, their graven images fall from the sky.

The Gaze

In contrast, *A Hard Day's Night* (Lester, 1964) also documents the pleasures of celebrity linked to what Stacey (1992) has described as the pleasures of masculinity.

"The images of John, Paul and George falling from the sky in slow motion present the male body as an object of high style for its own aesthetic state as the male form cuts through space in an artful fashion."

(Shillinglaw, 1999: 133)

Shillinglaw's (1999) analysis refers to the "Can't Buy Me Love" (1964) segment of the film. Overall, *A Hard Day's Night* (Lester, 1964) is an invitation to gaze at the Beatles and, as in a traditional musical, provides breaks in the action specifically to do so (Cohan, 1993; Agajanian, 2000) and to consider Mulvey's (1975) work on visual pleasure and looking. Agajanian (2000: 96) sees *A Hard Day's Night* (Lester, 1964) as "a backstage musical" despite being "nothing like any previous musical, British or American" (Agajanian, 2000: 91). It is steeped in the tradition of Hollywood musicals, despite its modern appearance and mock-documentary New Wave credentials. As Piotrowski (2008) argues, that there is an emphasis on the audience's role in Beatlemania, as represented in *A Hard Day's Night* (1964) with the audience as part of the story rather than passive viewers. According to Piotrowski (2008: 55) the opening scene creates a bond between fan and the group on screen and that in all the scenes in which the Beatles are seen performing "the camera acts as the audience's subjective point of view". To this Frith (1988: 12) adds: "we claim them through possession". The intimate televisual style of the film, facilitated through Lester's hand-held camera techniques, is another factor which creates intimacy between fan and star, creating a unique style of celebrity (Piotrowski, 2008). In addition to this role as observer of the Beatles' celebrity and commentator on its trappings, the character of Paul's grandfather also acts as surrogate fan, having access to their inner sanctum (Rolston and Murray, 2001). This is made clear in an early scene where he joins them in the caged-environment of the train's guards van as they perform *I Should Have Known Better* (1964), while the schoolgirl fans remain as the other side of the cage (King, 2013). In a later scene he trades on their celebrity by stealing an invitation to a gambling club and going in their place. Throughout the film he is seen collecting the groups' autographs so that he can sell their signed photos to fans outside the theatre where their live show is filmed. In this particular scene he exhorts the screaming girls to buy these pictures of "your own sweet boys" (Sweeney, 1993) and then, again, in his role as surrogate fan, attempts to rush the stage door to join the group in the rarified atmosphere of their inner sanctum of celebrity.

The action stops, as it does in the Hollywood musical (Cohan, 1993), for what are essentially a number of musical tableaux – "a pause on stage when all the performers briefly freeze in position" (Collins Concise English Dictionary, 1993: 1370) – not related to a gap in the romantic plot, as is customary with musicals, but the gap "overturns the customary way in which masculinity is assumed to advance and dominate the linear narrative" (Cohan, 1993: 49). Thus,

these breaks provide a space where the male stars perform and females gaze, providing what Mulvey refers to as moments of “erotic contemplation” (Mulvey, 1975: 19) or what Cohan (1993: 55) calls “a male spectacle” far from those offered by other film genres such as the Western/gangster films or action adventures, traditionally seen as appealing to men, as sites where men look at men. These set pieces or breaks in the narrative are referred to as tableaux because, it can be argued, their purpose is exactly as described by Cohan (1993), a set of frozen moments in which the audience is invited to gaze at the spectacle of performance.

Dressed-by-Brian

“at times, Brian would seem unable to pluck up courage to go into the Beatles’ dressing-room, but would stand out in the auditorium, suddenly as distant from them as the furthest screaming girl. I saw him once ... in one of those northern ABCs, when the curtains opened and the scream went up. He was standing there with tears streaming down his face.”

(Norman, 1981: 219)

Brian Epstein’s role as manager is also central to the Beatles’ celebrity in their Beatlemania period. Sweeney (1993:3) states: “Epstein wasn’t a professional manager at all, but another type of obsessive Beatlemania: a gay man a decade older than the Beatles who had recognized their sexual magnetism as well as their musical talent, and dedicated his life to making them famous”.

Savage (1991) has traced the influence of male homosexuality on pop music from the early 1960s’ “boy” stars (Tommy Steele, Cliff Richard, Billy Fury) through Bowie’s 1970s’ glam-rock androgyny to Boy George and beyond. Savage (1991: 155) argues that “it is from the milieu and sensibilities of the sexually divergent that pop music draws much of its substance”. The gay manager has been a fixture of the popular music scene in the UK since the late 1950s. From Larry Parnes’ stable of “boy” stars in the early 1960s to Wham! in the 1980s and Take That in the 1990s, the svengali-like qualities of the older man and his young boys has been part of pop music discourse (Napier-Bell, 1983; Savage 1991). Brian Epstein’s role as the Beatles’ manager and his importance in their rise to global fame and celebrity status cannot be underestimated (Norman, 1981; Irvin, 2002). Epstein’s journey from failed RADA theatrical to manager of his father’s store to manager of the most famous men of the 1960s has been well documented (Norman, 1981; The Beatles, 2000; Irvin, 2002), as has his “obsession” with John Lennon (Norman, 1981; Goldman, 1988). Epstein’s influence on their image, style and presentation, arguably rooted in his own homosexual svengali-ism and theatrical yearnings, is a vital part of their global appeal, all of which was established around 1963/4 and the signs of which are apparent in *A Hard Day’s Night* (Lester, 1964). Irvin (2002: 121) argues that: “the suited and booted, mop-topped Fab Four – the first globally recognised pop group – were Brian’s vision”.

Epstein’s obsession with his “boys” and his influence on their early presentational style and image (turning them from James Deanesque leather-clad rebels into well-groomed pop idols) can be read in this context. Drawing on Mulvey’s (1975) work on the gaze Savage (1991: 159) argues that the Beatles in *A Hard Day’s Night* (Lester, 1964) can be read as “the adored object ... homosexual desire translated into female adoration”, taking up a feminised, often narcissistic, position (Cohan, 1993; Neale, 1993). However, they can also be read, at this point, and in this film, as a site where gay aesthetics and pop music meet to question the social construction of male identity and to pose questions about new types of masculinities (Mäkelä, 2004), a central feature of their celebrity. Their global fame and position as cultural icons made them a focus for this debate. As Mäkelä (2004: 69) points out: “The Beatles’ success indicated that there was space for new kinds of masculinities in British culture, and even a demand for them”.

Their visual appearance in what can be termed their “dressed by Brian” period (King, 2013) is only part of the story. *A Hard Day’s Night* (Lester, 1964) is punctuated by discourses of the emergent importance of image in gayness or queer codes (Shillinglaw, 1999) and this is important for the debate on 1960s’ masculinities, given that *A Hard Day’s Night* (Lester, 1964) provides a good example of Fiske’s (1992) notion of a mass-produced text made into a popular text by the people. Shillinglaw (1999: 177) argues that *A Hard Day’s Night* (Lester, 1964) displays “deeply queer sensibilities” which are often overlooked or disregarded. Mäkelä (2004) sees playing with gender and identity as a central part of the Beatles’ early appeal, often passing this off as just another Beatle joke while “messing” with the audiences’ perception of gender. They are knowing insiders (Shillinglaw, 1999), and *A Hard Day’s Night* (Lester, 1964) provides a setting in which to display this knowledge. In the early railway scene carriage, described earlier, Lennon flutters his eyelids at the older “establishment” man and at one point faces him down with the words “give us a kiss”. McCartney narcissistically combs his hair in the mirror. Later, Ringo Starr is seen in a ladies’ hair salon under the dryer reading a copy of *Queen*. “That’s an in-joke, you know” says Lennon. Lennon camps it up with the other male artists in the building, offering to ‘swap’ costumes and calling “cheeky” after them down the corridor. In the rehearsal performance of the song *If I Fell* (1964) he serenades Starr with the words “If I fell in love with you / would you promise to be true?”. Lennon admitted to liking to play “faggy” (The Beatles, 2000: 98) and a lot of the queerness in the text is focused on him. He joins in with Lionel Blair and his dancers as they rehearse on stage, and there is even what could be read as a thinly veiled reference to the rumours about his relationship with Epstein when minder Norm warns him to shut up “or I’ll tell them all the truth about you”. “You wouldn’t” Lennon responds. “Ah, I would though” comes the reply.

There is a nine-minute scene towards the end of the film where the group’s TV performance finally takes place. This provides a good example of “a form of ritualised authentication of pleasure and meaning of the records through lurid experience” (Marshall, 1997:159). Filmed in the Scala Theatre in London, with an invited audience, the scene recreates the Beatles’ theatre performances of the time. Despite their insistence that they did not want to make a pop film like any previously produced, there is something of this scene that is similar in setting to Cliff and the Shadows’ performance at the end of *The Young Ones* (Furey, 1961). The difference, though, is that through the use of six different camera angles and his technique of jumping from one shot to another, Richard Lester manages to convey the energy and excitement of Beatlemania in action (McKinney, 2003) and creates the opportunity for the audience to see itself from the Beatles’ perspective, congruent with Pietrowski’s (2008) analysis of the relationship between audience and Beatles as central to Beatlemania. Cameras pan backwards and forwards between screaming girls (and boys) gazing at their heroes,

velvet collars, hands, feet, shirt cuffs, guitars, feet, backs and bottoms. At several points the film viewer gets to look through camera lenses and TV monitors to focus their own gaze on the spectacle. The process of visual reproduction itself is made obvious (McKinney, 2003). The cameras focus on the male body, full-screen close-ups of faces and hair, a long slow tracking shot from behind the group which lingers on Ringo Starr's posterior and Paul McCartney and George Harrison close together at one microphone, shaking their hair and "oohing" in *She Loves You*, a trademark of their early performances. The group appear in classic pose from this period – Ringo Starr raised on a podium at the back, John Lennon to the right playing his short-arm black and white Rickenbacker, George Harrison in the centre with his newly acquired Rickenbacker 360, Paul McCartney to the left, his left-handed Hofner bass creating visual symmetry. The grey velvet-collared suits, along with the round-collared "Beatle suits" (which appear in photographs in the film but are not actually worn) and "Beatle" boots, represent their most homoerotic dressed-by-Brian image and the film provides an opportunity to take a long look at the Beatles in this particular phase of their celebrity.

Conclusion

A Hard Day's Night, "nothing like any previous musical, British or American" (Agajanian, 2000: 91) provides a text through which to examine the Beatles' celebrity at the height of Beatlemania. Their ordinary-yet-extraordinariness, a precursor of modern-day celebrity, as discussed by Rojek (2001), is on show and Beatlemania, as an alliance between media, developing technology and the audience, provides both the substance and context of the text. It is a text in which popular music as a key site of the new celebrity class of the 1960s provides the setting, the text itself a good example of the emergence of the global village predicted by McLuhan (1964) with its aim of allowing a global audience to look at the Beatles.

The pleasures and the pain of quasi-religious fan-worship are apparent in the film at a time when celebrity was generally treated by the mass media as an exclusively positive state, glossing over the negative aspects in contrast to contemporary approaches to the lives of the rich and famous. Despite its beginnings, in the minds of its United Artists' producers, as yet another pop exploitation movie, *A Hard Day's Night* (Lester, 1964) emerges as a text which has undergone much critical reappraisal (Agajanian, 2000). The Beatles' exuberant playfulness, reflected both visually and musically in the film, juxtaposed with a mock-doc glimpse of their gruelling work schedule at this point, makes it an interesting text through which to reflect on their celebrity status and image at this point in the 1960s. The film documents a journey from North to South on more than one level. The production values, including its grainy black-and-white-ness, its nod towards French new wave and the documentary film-makers' hand-held camera techniques, link it to early 1960s' British New Wave cinema and the discourses of masculinity at work in some of these films. The work/play, inside/outside, trapped/free binaries are all on show here. The masculinist (Brittan, 1989) work ethic pervades the film, and yet the Beatles, like the male heroes of other "Northern" films, show signs of resistance through a combination of wit, creativity, humour and visual appearance, all key elements of their celebrity. Hegemonic masculinity (Carrigan et al., 1985; Connell, 1995; Hearn, 2004) is also challenged through the positioning of the Beatles in relation to female fans in an active rather than passive role. The beginning of the film finds them running in a somewhat effeminate manner. They are men running away from, rather than running after, women. At various points we see them running away and breaking out from the responsibilities of being a celebrity, a Beatle (and a man). The gender tourism (Reynolds and Ross, 1995) which is featured more strongly in their later films is hinted at here, while the queer codes (Shillinglaw, 1999) apparent in the film, coupled with the Beatles' visual appearance in their dressed-by-Brian period, create an interesting discourse around gender fluidity (Whiteley, 1997) and sexuality, again a central component of their celebrity status. The *mise en scène* of the film creates spaces in which to look at the Beatles (indeed, the film itself is a text designed for just such a purpose) and this allows for an interesting discussion around the work of Mulvey (1975) and others such as Cohan (1993), Neale (1993) and Bruzzi (1997) on the objectification and feminisation of men in such texts.

At a superficial level Beatlemania remains the yardstick in terms of global celebrity status what Marshall (200) has described as a road map for those who came after. Lester's film allows an exploration of the complexities at work in the relationship between star and audience, the pleasure of "abstract desire" (Rojek, 2001:47) in the relationship between fan and the Beatles at the heart Beatlemania, juxtaposed with themes of imprisonment and escape. Perhaps it is, then, "the Citizen Kane of Jukebox moves" (Sarris, 2006: 56).

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