The Musician and the Recording Studio: Satirical Perspectives in Film and Television

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Abstract. This article explores the relationship between musicians and recording studios in a range of satirical screen works. For two decades, there has been a debate about the necessity of professional recording studios amid increasingly sophisticated home recording technology. Against this backdrop, I examine scenarios featuring fictional, real, and adapted musician figures whose activities in the studios reveal « the musician's status in society and/or the microcosm in which he or she evolves », among other issues identified in the call for papers.

Included are portrayals of popular musical genres whose milieus are ripe for satirical readings. Docudrama *24 Hour Party People* (2002) spans fifteen years of Manchester's alternative music scene, and its studio scenes parallel the excesses and deathly aesthetics of the period. Documentary *Some Kind of Monster* (2004) is an observational portrait of a rock band (Metallica) whose studio time is dominated by the psyches of wealthy musicians requiring a therapist to mediate their battle of wills. Finally, pseudo-documentary *I'm Still Here* (2010), mockumentary *People Just Do Nothing* (2014-2018), and serialized comedy *Atlanta* (2016-present) upend the mystique of rappers' public personas by laying bare the delusion and illusion involved in pursuing commercial success in hip-hop and rap genres.

Keywords: Satire, Mockumentary, Urban Music, Madchester, Metallica

Le musicien et le studio d'enregistrement : perspectives satiriques au cinéma et à la télévision

Résumé. L'article que je propose explore les relations entre les musiciens et les studios d'enregistrement dans une série d'œuvres audiovisuelles satiriques. Depuis deux décennies, un débat existe sur la nécessité ou non d'avoir recours à des studios d'enregistrement professionnels alors que l'on peut enregistrer chez soi grâce à une technologie de plus en plus sophistiquée. Dans ce contexte, j'examine des scénarios présentant des figures de musiciens fictives, réelles ou adaptées dont l'activité au sein de studios révèle « le statut du musicien dans la société et/ou le microcosme dans lequel il ou elle évolue », l'un des points soulignés dans l'appel à articles.

Ce travail contient des représentations de genres musicaux populaires dont les milieux engendrent de multiples lectures satiriques. Le docudrame *24 Hour Party People* (2002) passe en revue quinze ans de la scène de musique alternative de Manchester, et ses scènes de studio reflètent les excès et l'esthétique lugubre de la période. Le documentaire *Some Kind of Monster* (2004) est un portrait détaillé d'un groupe de rock (Metallica) dont les passages en studio sont marqués par le psychisme de musiciens fortunés qui ont besoin d'un thérapeute pour arbitrer leurs bras de fer. Enfin, le pseudo-documentaire *I'm Still Here* (2010), le faux documentaire *People Just Do Nothing* (2014-2018), et la série humoristique *Atlanta* (2016-) renversent la mystique des *personas* publiques de rappeurs en mettant à nu le fantasme et l'illusion impliqués par la recherche du succès commercial dans les genres hip-hop et rap.

Mots-clés : satire, faux documentaire, musique urbaine, Madchester, Metallica

The aim of the present article is to illustrate « the musician's status in society and/or the microcosm in which he or she evolves »[1] by exploring films and television series that feature musician characters at work in professional recording studios. Each of the selections chosen, ranging from a scripted television comedy episode to various pseudo-documentaries and a feature-length documentary film, employs a satirical tone or functions as satire, relative to the figure of the musician in the studio. This variety of forms on a spectrum from fiction to non-fiction results in musician characters that, as representations of a real-life creative vocation, vary in their authenticity. Though the fictive events and elements distort the reality of the representations, the exaggerated behavior being satirized directly relates to the personas often observed in popular and scholarly accounts of musicians working in the studio. In all of these works, the musician figures' status and evolution correspond to conflicts between creative activity, exhibiting transgressive behavior and encountering the mechanisms of the music industry, often the specific rules and processes of the recording studio. Before closely reading the studio scenes, I will specify a framework for satire, outline the order in which the films and television series will be consid-

1 This theme was one of the issues identified in the original call for papers for *Savoirs en Prisme*, no 15.

ered, and address the state of the recording industry during the period of the film and television series' release.

One relevant classic definition of satire, from the *Century Dictionary and Cyclopedia* refers to works « denouncing vice, folly, incapacity, or failure, and holding it up to reprobation or ridicule » (1904: 5349). This understanding of satire informs the musician figures represented in the works considered here because these figures often embody such deficiencies, and their unwillingness to learn or change is central to the dramatic conflicts, making them suitable personalities for cautionary tales about how not to approach a professional career in music. Further, such bad behavior on the part of musicians corresponds to the « emotional labour » that Allan Watson and Jenna Ward have identified as a substantial aspect of professional producers and engineers navigating working relationships with musicians (Watson & Ward, 2013).

A current *Oxford English Dictionary* definition is helpful in specifying the functions or modes of works of art that engage in satire, using « humour, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticise prevailing immorality or foolishness » (2021). A more contemporary, musically-inflected definition of satire comes from Jordan Pickering's recent writing on the punk band Idles. Pickering's conception of satire joins the perspective and function of the two specified dictionary definitions and adds to these a dimension related to the viewer's perception: « Satire tends to take bad behavior to a humorous extreme in order to expose what's wrong with it. It participates in the bad behavior in order to hold up a mirror, and it does so humorously so that a viewer might sufficiently lower their guard to see themselves in that mirror » (Pickering, 2020).

Though Pickering's focus is the performance and attitude of Idles' lead singer, understood more broadly his definition of satire has a twofold benefit to the present article. First, several of the musician figures considered here have been characterized to exhibit bad behavior in a way that exposes their flaws rather than approves of their actions. Second, the pseudo-documentary or documentary style of a majority of the television episodes and films examined in this article invites participation with the subject, as distinct from mere observation. This participation with the subject includes, in every case, the creation of entertaining music within contexts of recognizable brands within the real commercial music industry. Further, the setting of the studio offers the viewer/listener a privileged position on songs in progress, and the repetition of these songs across multiple takes creates a familiarity with the material. Thus the viewer/listener identifies with the arcs of both the performer/creator and the creation in progress, with the bad behavior being held up to scrutiny often inseparable from the artistic development.

One influential theory of satire that encompasses this range of understandings, up to and including the modern film and television satire that is the subject of this article, is that articulated by Edward A. Bloom and Lillian D. Bloom in *The Satiric Mode of Feeling: A Theory of Intention*. As they explicate Jonathan Swift's observation that satire is « useful and diverting », Bloom and Bloom point out that both classical and neoclassical satire « [follow] the customary

double path of instruction and delight » (1969: 115), a duality sustained by the contemporary works considered here.

The structure of the article divides the films and television series into two groups. The first group, consisting of serialized television comedy *Atlanta* (2016-present), serialized television mockumentary *People Just Do Nothing* (2014-2018), and pseudo-documentary feature film *I'm Still Here* (2010), includes musician figures who have reached varying levels of visibility or notoriety, but who have not yet graduated to a musical career profile that includes regular use of professional recording studios. Their forays into professional recording studios, examined here, reveal how unaware or ill-prepared they are for succeeding in such a professional environment. These figures represent an imbalance between « the dimensions of musical self-concept » identified by Maria B. Spychiger, as their assumptions about their musical selves derived from « social, emotional, and physical » dimensions distort the reality of their « ability » to perform as professional musicians (Spychiger, 2017: 271). In other words, these figures experience a specious validation of their musical aspirations when they gain entry into professional studios. However, getting into the studio only exposes the harsh reality that they are lacking in ability sufficient to perform as professionals, and this dissonance prompts further bad behavior.

The second group, a pairing consisting of docudrama feature *24 Hour Party People* (2002) and documentary feature *Some Kind of Monster* (2004), profiles successful musicians who have enjoyed opportunities to work in professional recording studios with sought-after producers and engineers, but who remain ignorant, imprudent, or self-centered in their behavior. Inette Swart's research on « ego boundaries and self-esteem » in musicians is useful for analyzing these figures, insofar as these musicians are arguably « master[s] of [their] craft » with a « thorough understanding of the medium » and « impeccable technique », but who lack « a thorough understanding of the prevailing rules, norms, customs, and boundaries accepted by society » (Swart, 2016: 694). These instances typify a different sort of imbalance wherein professional ability is present but counterweighed by the ignorance or rejection of those values that would support the social contract of which the musical group is but one microcosm.

All of these works are postmillennial entertainment products, and as such they were released against the backdrop of the modern turbulence of the recording industry itself. In the year 2000, two developments in the music recording industry seemed to point to distinct dimensions of the industry's overall health and future. The promising development was that compact disc (CD) sales in the United States reached a peak value of 13.2 billion dollars. The downbeat news arrived in obituaries written about Los Angeles' historic Electro-Vox studio, which was closing down after operating for a longer period than any other recording company (Pool, 2000). These two items, one a story of flourishing and the other of perishing, both signified shifts for musicians, studio professionals, and others involved in the business of recording and distributing music.

However, in retrospect, neither story accurately predicted the narrative that would unfold in the next two decades. CD sales would decline in rele-

vance. Yet, as a result of streaming and premium subscription sales, total revenue for recorded music in 2020 was higher than any year since 2005, the year that the CD format began to precipitously fall in popularity (RIAA, 2020). As for the death of studio Electro-Vox, and what the demise of a legendary studio portended for other studios, the obituaries were premature. While Electro-Vox experienced the retirement of a longtime engineer, new ownership, and a (brief) name change, the business remains open to this day.

From time to time, there are captivating stories of musicians who succeed in bypassing the traditional recording studio process. For example, the Beach Boys' groundbreaking *Smiley Smile* (1967) was a home-recorded, simplified variation of material originally intended for unfinished masterpiece *Smile*, an album that had been labored over at traditional recording studios before being abandoned. Bruce Springsteen's critically acclaimed *Nebraska* (1982) was a collection of demo songs recorded and mixed by Springsteen, never intended to be a final product. The most provocative recent example is Billie Eilish's *When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?* (2019), a work recorded in her brother Finneas' bedroom studio, which reached number one chart positions across the globe and won the Grammy Award for Album of the Year in 2020.

More often, however, musical albums that attain critical and commercial success in mainstream channels are the products of musicians working in professional studios with producers, engineers, and other studio workers. In 2018, Clive Young of professional audio news outlet *Pro Sound* offered a rebuttal to published reports in *24/7 Wall St.* and *USA Today* that recording studios were dying institutions. Young's argument for the health of recording studios was supported by the number of functioning studios and the sizable record industry revenue that results from those studios. His concluding statement argues for the professional quality, equipment, and processes that a recording studio offers musicians:

> Studios are also part of the larger pro-audio ecosystem, and the important word there is « pro », as in « audio created by professionals ». Pros are people with real-world experience and education, regardless of whether they're working in a famous big-room studio or a small, private facility, and they are not going to be replaced by weekend warriors […] the greatest feature a studio can offer is its professional staff: people with hard-won knowledge and talent who can make a client sound better than he or she has any right to (Young, 2018).

Among the five works considered here, *Atlanta* is an outlier for being a conventionally filmed fictional series with little influence from non-fiction narrative styles. Occasionally, image acquisition formats such as mobile phones and narrative contexts including panel shows or news reports are part of the series' fiction, but the dominant style of the program is typical of a single-camera half-hour comedy series. Nevertheless, there is little conventional to what the writ-

ers, directors and visual artists behind the series create within that format, as the show often departs into surreal scenarios and distinctive framing, indicative of show creator Donald Glover's original vision for the series: « I just always wanted to make *Twin Peaks* with rappers »[2].

The juxtaposition of two rapper characters is the basis for *Atlanta*'s satirical recording studio sequence in series two, episode three « Money Bag Shawty ». As far as the viewer sees, neither of these characters produces any usable material during the session. The sequence's significant function is to highlight the impassive ruthlessness that a truly successful rapper must possess in order to evolve within the industry. Lead character Alfred Miles (Brian Tyree Henry), popularly known as his rap persona « Paper Boi », is a drug dealer whose trap songs have gained attention online, most recently resulting in a streaming gold record. Supporting character Clark County (RJ Walker) is a markedly more successful rapper, whom Paper Boi visits at a professional recording studio where Clark County is recording new material.

This sequence is the only instance in the two produced series of *Atlanta* so far in which Paper Boi appears at a professional recording studio. In fact, though the viewer often sees evidence of the success of his musical products, there is a conspicuous lack of scenes that feature him having any creative agency over the songs or involvement with their production. « Money Bag Shawty » highlights how foreign the studio environment is to him by presenting Clark County's recording session as a sort of alternate or advanced reality, in which the more successful rapper has stacks of currency bearing the face of abolitionist Harriet Tubman, years before such currency is in circulation.

Though Paper Boi routinely complains that he lacks opportunities to reach the next level of his musical career, he rarely seems aware that it is his own failure to work hard and seize such opportunities that results in his impression of a stalling career. He prefers to blame cousin and career manager Earn (Donald Glover) for his low-level status. In « Money Bag Shawty », Clark County offers to give Paper Boi some verses on the tracks he is recording, but Paper Boi balks, saying he has to smoke some blunts and drink some spirits to get « in the zone ». Clark County declines to partake in either when Paper Boi tries to share with him, explaining that he has to care for his voice (his instrument) and that he does not drink alcohol. Tellingly, Clark County proceeds to insert « Hennessy plus the herb » in his subsequent freestyle rap while in the recording booth. This parasitic behavior, which takes lyrical inspiration from Paper Boi's lifestyle as a way of building one's brand while simultaneously dodging the dulling effects of drug usage, reveals how calculating Clark County is as a rapper.

Sensing Clark County's superiority within the business, Paper Boi raises the topic of endorsement money. A minor thread of *Atlanta*'s plot line sees Clark County appearing in inane advertisements for products including Yoo-hoo, a chocolate beverage targeted at children. This plot thread satirizes a genuine problem that lies at the intersection of the music business and public health, as

2 Donald Glover made these remarks at the Television Critics Association Convention in 2016.

a 2016 *Pediatrics* study concluded that « music celebrities often endorse energy-dense, nutrient-poor products » (Bragg, Miller, Elizee, Dighe & Elbel, 2016: 6). Paper Boi reveals that he turned down an offer from Rap Snacks, a line of salty snacks featuring flavors suiting particular rappers' brands (and whose faces appear on the packaging); the implication being that Rap Snacks is not on the same level as Yoo-hoo. This canny comparison of two unhealthy food brands parallels the contrasting individual musical personas each rapper is building through their business decisions.

A final point of comparison is an exaggerated sense of violence that emerges from Clark County's otherwise affable, in some ways child-friendly image. His repeated abuse of a nameless recording studio engineer (Jonathon Pawlowski) whose software crashes during recording and playback illustrates Watson and Ward's contention that within the professional recording studio, « engineers are, then, evokers of and witnesses to emotional displays that in most other work-based contexts, and even social contexts, would be considered inappropriate » (Watson & Ward, 2013: 2910). Clark County's abuse of the engineer goes thoroughly unchecked; escalating from verbal insults to threats of violence to instructing an associate (Donald Paul) to physically discipline the engineer after Clark County takes a walk away from the studio, enjoying plausible deniability.

The overconfident musical crew known as Kurupt FM, the focus of *People Just Do Nothing*, forms a contrast with Paper Boi's keen awareness of his minor status within the music industry. All unemployed, devoting nearly all of their days to a UK garage pirate radio station in Brentford, West London, ringleader rapper MC Grindah (Allan « Seapa » Mustafa), DJ Beats (Hugo Chegwin) and full-time drug user and sometimes DJ/selector Steves (Steve Stamp) embody an approach to musical identity that ignores the reality of their circumstances. For example, their radio station only reaches listeners within a few-miles radius of their location in Steves Nan's flat, but Grindah continuously promotes his own skills and the station's dominance as being the best « in the galaxy ».

Grindah's claims are often so outsized that no rational attempt to counter them would be effective. The mockumentary format positions the series to appear as a genuine televised chronicle of pirate radio station Kurupt FM and its group of UK garage music enthusiasts. This aspect of the series allows an off-screen interviewer to occasionally ask questions of the subjects, but these reasonable inquiries are most often met with more boasting or with a fundamental misunderstanding of what is being asked. The sometimes-manager of Kurupt FM, an unethical, lonely entrepreneur named Chabuddy G (Asim Chaudhry) is similarly delusional, resulting in there being few voices of reason in the men's lives to wake them from their musical fantasy. Those individuals who could offer insight and guidance, such as quiet DJ Decoy (Daniel Sylvester Woolford), are ignored and remain largely in the background of the action.

As the self-concept of Grindah and Kurupt FM are entirely predicated on hyperbole, nearly everything the character does is pointedly satirical, targeting

the endemic « self-praise »[3] of rappers, which seems to be a permanent feature of the musical territory, across subgenres. Grindah's philosophy, summarized in his dialogue from series five « if you know where your dreams are, you don't need to live in reality » removes from « musical identity » the prerequisite for certain kinds of « musical experience » (Spychiger, 2017). The first episode of the third series, « Dubplate », exposes Kurupt FM's folly and attests to the difficulties that recording studio professionals face when artists fail to understand or respect the recording process.

« Dubplate » finds the Kurupt FM crew recording at a professional studio, thanks to Chabuddy G's paying to book the time. Grindah's warped perception of time is a recurring aspect of his failure to understand how a professional studio operates. Reasoning that they will easily be able to record a four-minute track within an hour of studio time, Grindah rebuffs the studio operator's offer for instructions on how to use the equipment. Despite Decoy's skills at creating a beat and attempts to mind the clock, Grindah and Beats waste time watching YouTube videos for inspiration, with Grindah arguing that searching for inspiration takes precedence over staying on schedule.

Though Steves displays some savant-like talent for playing the keyboard, Grindah tells him to stop playing music, preferring repeated takes of Steves' breaking glass, damaging the studio environment. Eventually, time begins to run out, and with Chabuddy G only being able to afford a single hour of recording, Kurupt FM resorts to destructive behavior as a way of not yielding to the studio operator when their time is nearly up. With four minutes left in their booking, Grindah and Steves block the entrances with instruments and equipment, and Grindah locks himself in the booth to record his vocal track.

Kurupt FM's physical destruction of the studio is an exaggerated form of the lack of respect sometimes shown by musicians whose awareness and prowess as recording artists fall far short of the expertise offered by professional producers and engineers. Indeed, Philip Newell notes that one source of antagonism for « the recording industry [as] a working entity » consists of « the demands of newly successful artistes (whose new-found influence may be totally disproportional to their knowledge and experience of the recording process) » (Newell, 2017: 772). In the case of Kurupt FM, there is little success to fuel such bad behavior, only a surplus of self-praise.

After the studio adventure, Grindah acknowledges that recording and mixing can all be completed « on your laptop these days » and that the studio experience is unnecessary. Thus, Kurupt FM values the professional recording studio experience only to the degree that it allows them to boast of being in the studio. One irony of the recording studio sequence is that the song produced, « Heart Monitor Riddem », has been a mainstay of *People Just Do Nothing* across media, appearing in musical and music video form within the television series and on social media channels, included on a tie-in musical album, and featured in the trailer for 2021 feature film *People Just Do Nothing: Big in Japan*.

3 *The Michigan Daily*'s Joe Fraley addressed this aspect of hip-hop in 2017's « He got a big ego: Breaking down self-praise in hip hop ».

Therefore, while a successful career in music continues to elude the aspiring artists of Kurupt FM, the song produced within the fictional studio session has been exponentially lucrative for the series' brand.

Musician figures such as Paper Boi and the men of Kurupt FM fail to take advantage of potential stepping-stones within their musical careers, in part because they are too unwilling to see their own amateurish shortcomings and adapt to the professional mechanisms that allow other artists to evolve. Both are in a position of dependence on established artists, managers, radio hosts, label owners, and other professionals to provide access to better opportunities. The protagonist JP (Joaquin Phoenix) of *I'm Still Here* is in a similar position, insofar as he seeks the approval and creative oversight of a specific artist/producer/mogul, P. Diddy (Sean Combs). Within *I'm Still Here*, Diddy demonstrates the emotional labor involved in a producer's relationship with a musical artist, even whilst ultimately declining to produce his music.

As both Phoenix and Combs are playing versions of themselves, *I'm Still Here* exists within a more layered form of satire, in which the subjects have both genuinely achieved considerable influence in the entertainment industry and are performing a story of struggle and failure in which one of them (JP) decides to switch from acting to rapping but does not impress his chosen mentor (Diddy). While the film is effective in satirizing the vagaries of an overindulged artist wanting to shift into an area of artistic expression for which he is grossly underqualified, the film's director Casey Affleck stops short of identifying a particular satirical target or meaning in the film:

> I don't have a point to make, though. If it feels like a cautionary tale, what would be the warning? When you have a dream and others tell you, you are no good, give it up? Don't become famous? Prepare, practice and use stepping-stones? Or maybe don't be incredibly mean to those around you? […] I don't know the point. I only know that it is of course in some way about celebrity culture. It's about fame, in some way (Ebert, 2010).

Affleck and his star Phoenix created their pseudo-documentary in such a way that most of the media covering Phoenix's apparent public breakdown were not aware that it was just a performance. As Affleck accompanied Phoenix (in character as JP) to many events where media were present, the filmmaker was able to shoot observational/participatory documentary-style footage of his star's increasingly troubling behavior and then edit that footage together with evidence of how fully the media sought to exploit the story of a celebrity in crisis rather than offer concern. Though much of JP's behavior is objectionable, including his drug use, treatment of women, and abuse of his personal and professional associates, the satire within the film conspicuously targets the media's predatory reaction to that behavior.

Much of the memorable bad behavior covered by the film and the media's cameras occurs during live hip-hop performances in which JP awkwardly flows

through his lyrics in front of star-struck, bemused, or heckling crowds. Yet it is JP's two encounters with Diddy that foreground JP's lack of musical proficiency as well as his unawareness of the investments required to operate as a professional musician. JP begins to explain to Diddy that he has a home studio capable of recording his music, and Diddy takes offense, countering that when artists attempt to operate outside of their own industries (in JP's case, the film industry), they do not feel required to make a significant financial commitment. Diddy sees this double standard as a sign of disrespect towards the musical industry in which he is a mogul. After demonstrating his own keen awareness of the expenses involved in the film industry, Diddy next lists various musical recording expenses « studio, engineer, me… me…, speakers » and then asks JP the only question that counts as a predicate for considering serving as his producer: « Do you have any money? »

With the question of financing still hanging in the air, and following more of JP's public breakdown, the two men reunite in Diddy's well-equipped recording studio. Given the opportunity to demonstrate his musical ability with a compact disc of home-recorded songs, JP asks Diddy what kind of « vibe » he is looking for, to which Diddy responds, « play me a hit ». Each of the three songs JP previews for Diddy is lacking in musical and lyrical dynamism. Lyrically, the first song situates JP within a spiritual battle, the second song seems to concern his past as a child actor, and the third song consists almost entirely of the word « complications ». It should be noted that in the context of mumble-rap/Soundcloud rap, a style that deemphasizes intelligent lyricism in favor of mood, and which emerged a couple years after *I'm Still Here*, some of JP's music seems uncannily ahead of its time. Aspects of *I'm Still Here*'s fictional music that might have seemed too lackluster to believe as JP's concept of a best effort in 2010 now compare favorably to the druggy, repetitive stream-of-consciousness raps that are popular with many young hip-hop enthusiasts. Yet in 2010, with a mainstream rap mogul like Diddy as his audience, none of these tracks suffice, with Diddy humorously responding to the music with phrases like « don't play that one » and « forget it, that's enough ». The effect of time and evolving musical trends on the believability of *I'm Still Here* illustrates the ability of the pseudo-documentary form to oscillate in credibility, relative to the circumstances in which it is screened.

Diddy interrogates JP about why he wants to venture into hip-hop, suggesting that JP might be lampooning the genre out of a lack of respect for it, but JP insists that he has a genuine connection to hip-hop, despite not being able to articulate what that connection is. Though Diddy offers his faint approval of two of JP's tracks and affirms JP's dreams of being a rapper, he concludes « you're not ready to record with me. You're not at that point yet ». He then hugs JP and tells him he loves him.

Docudrama *24 Hour Party People* illustrates that not all producers are as tactful and sensitive as the version of Diddy that appears in *I'm Still Here*. Michael Winterbottom's film is shot like a documentary, and one of the principal real-life characters is Martin Hannett (Andy Serkis), a record producer

whose character arc in the film includes bad behavior at the expense of musicians and label heads, overindulgence in drugs, and deadly gluttony. The film is hosted by Tony Wilson (Steve Coogan), an individual whose real-life career as a television presenter provides a clever context for the narrated dramatizations. Wilson's function as a host is to structure the film because he (through Coogan's embodiment) is on screen and on the soundtrack presenting the narrative events. A secondary function of this hosting is the layer of subjectivity present in Wilson's perspective on the plot, an approach that helps to blur the line between reality and fiction.

Covering musical trends in Manchester, England, from the 1970s to the 1990s, *24 Hour Party People* is much more comprehensive than any other work examined in this article. Compared with the other works, there are also more explicit reflections on the art and business of the music industry, as Wilson's commentary within the film concerns the differences between live performance, televised performance, and recorded performance and the way in which the ascendancy of rave culture eventually prized the medium (the record itself) above the performing musician. Though the film includes dozens of musician figures across several of the defining bands of the period, Wilson points out that reckless producer Hannett is « the only bona fide genius in this story ».

The satirical tone of *24 Hour Party People* often focuses on the conflict between musical expression and the need to make money to sustain the businesses of a record label, recording studios, and live music venues. These business concerns all stem from Wilson's roles as a founder of Factory Records involved with his artists' recording sessions, as well as the manager of the Haçienda club at which Factory Records artists performed. As with the other examples previously covered, the recording studio is a primary setting in which these conflicts arise.

Hannett's first studio scene is in a recording session for the band that would become Joy Division. Right away, he berates the drummer, calling his performance « horrible… racket » and saying he's bored of hearing drummers play in a conventional way. Evidence of Hannett's idiosyncratic genius is in his advice that the drummer should play « a lot simpler, faster but slower ».

Another stroke of genius (indeed, Tony Wilson points out that Hannett is « the only bona fide genius in this story ») is Hannett's tactic for ensuring that the drummer executes such a sound. Citing a rattling noise coming from the drum kit, Hannett says they are going to have to dismantle the drums to discover the source. When Wilson asks if such a time-consuming effort will count towards the hourly rate he is paying for the session, Hannett responds « We're still working, aren't we? » After having a significantly pared-down version of the drum kit reassembled on the roof (another apparently mad technique whose method is soon revealed), Hannett gets the sound he sought: a simple, mechanistic drum beat so devoid of the previous flourishes that everyone forgets a human drummer is on the roof playing. To punctuate the satire, there is a shot of Wilson and the rest of the band leaving the studio at night, which pans and tilts to the drummer still on the roof, still playing the rhythm.

The concern for budget that is mostly a subtext of the initial recording session sequence ultimately develops into a deep source of contention that divides Hannett and label head Wilson. Hannett strongly disagrees that money should be deducted from the music recording budget to fund other priorities of Wilson's, including the club and ornate record packaging that loses the label money with each sale. Wilson's opposing attitude is summed up in his dialogue, « never count the cost of beauty ». Though Hannett's downward spiral into drug addiction and apparent murderous tendencies showcases the unhealthy lifestyles often experienced by engineers and producers, his concern for preserving money for recording proves to be prescient. Wilson's subsequent business failures all revolve around a vicious cycle of losing money, prompting the need for more recording sessions so that he could sell records to reinvest those proceeds into failing businesses. In two parallel scenes, one involving musicians' severe drug dependency and the other the shutdown of a club, the instruments and recording equipment necessary to create music are sold off or given away, sacrificed to more pressing concerns within the contexts of the narrative. Eventually, both the money and the music come to an end. This total reduction of the instruments and recording equipment concretizes the effects of the imbalances identified by Spychiger and Swart.

Joe Berlinger and Bruce Sinofsky's *Some Kind of Monster* exists on a different plane from the four works previously discussed because the form is distinctive (an entirely non-fictional film) and its unorthodox production history involves origins as a record label-funded infomercial, the rights to which were purchased by the band for millions of dollars so that the filmmakers could release the film as a documentary feature. Additionally, the premise of the film is the recording of an album by Metallica, a group of musical figures with almost unparalleled status and wealth. Unlike the musician figures profiled in the other works, there is no further status to achieve and no more advanced level to which they could evolve professionally. Metallica is at the highest echelon of the popular music industry, which is particularly noteworthy for a heavy metal band. In *Some Kind of Monster*, their musical activity becomes frequently supplanted by infighting and extensive group therapy, which (to invert a popular idiom), results in more talk and less rock, to an even greater degree than the film's near-precedent *Let It Be* (1970), which documented the Beatles at odds with one another. *Some Kind of Monster* demythologizes the metal band Metallica, both by illuminating the fractures that threaten to obliterate the collective brand and musical endeavor, as well as by revealing the individuals within that collective as emotional and vulnerable figures, a sharp contrast to their tough public image.

Thus, the satirical elements of *Some Kind of Monster* are not the explicit focus or mode of the documentary filmmakers and their observational cameras, but rather they emerge within the reception of the film by an audience as they compare and contrast these hardened public figures with their emotional, private selves as revealed by the studio encounters. Popular culture critic Chuck Klosterman effectively captured such reception by citing a definitive emotional scene from the film and the resultant reaction, writing of a heated exchange

between lead singer James Hetfield and his foil, drummer Lars Ulrich, which culminates in Ulrich « screaming [a] singular expletive into the singer's face »: « It's perhaps the most intimate, most honest, most emotionally authentic exchange these two men have ever experienced. This is also the scene at which – if you are in the audience– you will probably laugh » (Klosterman, 2004). Here, Klosterman's prediction of the audience's response brings to mind Bloom and Bloom's theory of satirical intention: « there is no convenient gauge for determining how tightly the satirist has turned the screw of painful intention. Each reader, consequently, must decide that for himself on a private scale which measures his own tolerance to shock, derision, or vexation » (1969: 122). By all accounts, the filmmakers behind *Some Kind of Monster* do not intend to weaponize satire, but their subjects' acting out within highly satirizable institutions, and especially within the crucible of the recording studio, tests the audience's tolerance of or sympathy for such behavior on display.

Some Kind of Monster is an appropriate film with which to conclude this article because it reveals that many of the elements that might seem like the growing pains of emerging artists, such as the search for inspiration, the emotional labor involved in managing musicians' creative activity in the studio, and questions regarding what role finances should play in that creative activity, are all still present and arguably much more complicated in the lives of exceptionally successful musicians. For example, Metallica has no trouble affording studio time, a point highlighted by a subplot that sees them construct a complex professional studio that they alone are able to use. Despite this, they record little music there during months of attempted recording, documented by Berlinger and Sinofsky. Front man Hetfield's abrupt exit to seek treatment for his addictions brings the music to a halt. The producer, Bob Rock, who is ostensibly a leader within the studio environment, becomes the bass player in the wake of the former bassist's acrimonious exit, and the remaining core members still argue over the direction of the album and interfere with each other's individual contributions. The record label and management executives have little say in the band's obligations and creative inspirations. Yet, as it concerns the big money topics, including the promotion of the new album and coordinating the album release with radio stations and music television channels, Metallica is at the executives' mercy. The emotional labor that might be one among many responsibilities of a recording studio professional has been transferred to an outside performance coach, whom the band pays forty thousand dollars a month to lead therapy sessions. Nearly the entire film is shot in and around recording studios, but the quality of the music itself is among the least probed topics of the feature film.

Conclusion

Films and television shows about aspiring or professional musicians utilize scenes set in recording studios to dramatize particular moments of development in the careers of artists. The surface texts offer entertaining scenes of songs being created, which invests the viewing audience in the process of creation and creates expectations for the products of that creation, as well as the success or failure thereof. On another level, the larger thematic import of such scenes is often the business mechanisms and the emotional and psychological states that drive the creative activity and the bad behavior that sometimes follows. Therefore, these acts of creation involve the viewer's complicity with the bad or exaggerated behavior on display, as the viewer's investment in the product (even if merely as the outcome of narrative events) to some degree excuses the behavior necessary to create that product.

A satirical framework, either in the scripting, shooting and editing, or in the reception by an audience, allows these films and television shows to participate in and comment on the external pressures and internal impulses of musician figures, which are always present in the songs they create but which might go unseen if not for the camera. In these works that blur the line between reality and fiction, it is often the layer of fiction or an unexpected narrative development within non-fiction that focuses the viewer most acutely on the unstable mythologies that propel the actual commercial music industry and the imbalances between ambition and ability that get sorted out when the will to create meets the pressure to record.

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