

Roll Up! For the Magical Mystery Tour: An Examination of Beatles Fandom, Pilgrimage and Identity

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ABSTRACT

Through the examination of ethnographic data collected via interviews with Beatles fans who had explored Liverpool tourist sites such as Strawberry Fields, The Cavern, 20 Forthlin Road, Mendips, the Casbah Coffee Club, St Peter's Church, and Penny Lane, this project explores the connection between place and identity. It makes the claim that for Beatles fans, visiting sites associated with the band they love constitutes an act of pilgrimage, giving the individual a way to interact with a place that is important to them. In examining this action of pilgrimage, the author argues that this process links place and identity, as a fan's ability to contextualise the site is based on knowledge achieved from their fandom. The act of site contextualisation based on fandom not only gives meaning to the site but also allows the individual to reinforce their identity as a Beatles fan.

KEYWORDS

Beatles, Fandom, Identity, Liverpool, Pilgrimage

Introduction

The Beatles are undoubtedly iconic, as the band and their music have left an indelible impression on the world. During the eight years that they were active, the Beatles produced music that changed how the world understood rock, and their work still influences how music is composed today (Turner 2015, 14). The Beatles impact on music was matched only by the influence the band had on its fans. The music of the Beatles has an unexplainable universal quality that resonates with listeners, resulting in the continuing presence of the band on the cultural landscape (Kruse 2005, 87).

As the birthplace and home to all four members of the band until they gained international fame, Liverpool remains intrinsically linked with the Beatles legacy (Kruse 2005, 87). This connection has transformed the city of Liverpool into a hotspot for Beatles fans, who come from around the world to visit sites associated with the band. For individuals who consider themselves fans of the Beatles, a visit to these sites can be a momentous occasion, imbued with personal meaning akin to a religious pilgrimage. Drawing and building on existing academic theories of secular pilgrimage research, fandom studies, and concepts that link identity and place, this article argues that to fans, an act of fan-based pilgrimage is both a physical voyage and an inner journey. When visiting Beatles spaces, fans draw on their own fandom to give the site and their visit context. This act of contextualisation allows the individual to construct a sense of closeness between themselves and the Beatles, both confirming and rewarding their

devotion as a fan. The attachment that is created while visiting an important Beatles site fosters a sense of intimacy that allows the fan not only to feel connected to the place of pilgrimage but also to an essential aspect of their own identities; the part of them that identifies as a Beatles fan.

Methodology

To explore how Beatles-based Liverpool attractions function as pilgrimage sites, this study draws on original ethnographic data collected as part of the author's PhD fieldwork. The data used in this article comes from a series of semi-structured interviews that were conducted in order to explore and understand how an individual's fandom influences how they interact with Beatles sites in Liverpool. Data was gathered from two main groups of participants: firstly, interviews were conducted with individuals who were visiting Liverpool and who identified as Beatles fans, thus providing insight to how these interview participants contextualised and understood their time in Liverpool in relationship to their Beatles fandom. The second group were individuals who work within the Liverpool Beatles Heritage Industry as tour guides or as on-site staff members. These participants who have daily interactions with both fan and non-fan travellers can provide insight into how visitors interact with and perceive these tourist sites.

Data for this study was collected via a qualitative case study method that considers how human experience shapes social reality (Bryman 2016, 493). The analysis of the data (based on grounded theory) was completed via the processes of open coding and selective coding (Corbin and Strauss 2008, 390). In the preliminary stage of the fieldwork, open coding was employed to identify critical concepts and key patterns within the qualitative data. During the early stages of the research, the process of data collection and analysis occurred in tandem, as this approach helped organise the data and allowed for the discovery of recurring concepts (Corbin and Strauss 2008, 390). After the data collection was completed (to the best of the researcher's ability, as it should be noted that data collection was affected by the closure of the Liverpool tourist industry in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, creating a smaller data set than initially intended), the process of selective coding was employed, allowing for the isolation and identification of the main themes present within the data (Bryman 2016, 569).

As no qualitative research is entirely free of bias, the researcher must be aware of their own position and strive to make sure that there is a limited incursion of personal values into the research process (Bryman 2016, 39). During the process of data collection and analysis, my impartial attitude towards Liverpool and the Beatles was informed by my own music preferences. While I enjoy the music of the Beatles, I would not consider myself a fan. Therefore, my personal opinions did not significantly influence the collection of data due to the existence of any personal fan-based bias.

Only a Northern Song: The Beatles-Liverpool Connection

6 July 1957 is an important event in Beatles lore, as it was the day when a 15-year-old Paul McCartney met a 16-year-old John Lennon at a garden fete held at St Peter's Church. John was immediately impressed by Paul's ability to play and two weeks later Paul was asked to join John's band the Quarrymen (Roberts 2018, 41). Bonding over their similar family background

and love of music, the Lennon-McCartney songwriting partnership was born. Eventually renamed as the Beatles, the band (composed of John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison, and Pete Best) played a string of concerts in Liverpool (Loker 2009, 39). In 1960 the band travelled to Hamburg. In Germany, they learned to play for a live audience, perfecting their showmanship (Loker 2009, 2). When the Beatles returned to Liverpool in 1961, they were scouted by Brian Epstein and after Ringo Starr replaced Pete Best on drums, the band was signed to EMI's Parlophone label in 1962. The Beatles first record, *Please Please Me*, soon reached number one on the charts and from that point on, their popularity only grew (Loker 2009, 87). Screaming fans greeted the band wherever they played and Beatlemania gripped the world. Playing live finally became too much and in 1966 the Beatles became a studio-only band (Turner 2015, 174). From 1966-1970 the Beatles would release some of their most iconic LPs, including *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, *The Magical Mystery Tour*, *The Beatles* (known widely as *The White Album*), and *Abbey Road*. However, this was not to last; on 8 May 1970, the Beatles shocked the world by announcing they were breaking up (Loker 2009, 382). Despite only being active for eight years, the Beatles left their mark on music history. Their legacy and music have permeated culture to the point that it is almost impossible to imagine a world where they don't exist.

The city of Liverpool is often construed as the birthplace of the Beatles, not only because the four members of the band were born and raised in the city, but also because Liverpool is where the Beatles started their rise to fame. Within the city limits, all four members met, wrote songs, and played music together; it is where the band was originally discovered, where they performed their first gigs, and where they started their climb to the top. The connection between the city and the band has always been part of the cultural identity of Liverpool (Brocken 2015, 3). In 2008, when Liverpool was bestowed with the title of European City of Culture, this connection became globally established when the city leaders started to heavily promote Liverpool as the birthplace of the Beatles on an international scale (Brocken 2015, 200). The result of this rebranding and rebuilding was successful as Liverpool is now intrinsically linked with the Beatles. Even if people know nothing about the history of the city, they identify Liverpool as the birthplace of the Beatles. As Sadie, who works at a Beatles site, highlights:

Like I've found that if, like, I go abroad and people ask me where I am from, I go "Oh, I'm from Liverpool" they go "Liverpool?" And I go "you know, the Beatles" and it's like "Oh yah the Beatles!" It's just, it's just like a descriptor, yah, it's like a by-word.

Valerie, a Beatles tour guide, builds on the strength of this connection. She points out that the association with the Beatles is unique and that the connection between the city and the band gives Liverpool an intrinsic quality that no other location has.:

Oh, we wouldn't have won the City of Culture for a start without the Beatles. The Beatles are the icing on the cake, okay [...] Liverpool is a fantastic city, it's um a historic city, it's um earned its place in history, for both notorious as well as wonderful reasons. But the only unique selling point, is that the most iconic band, the most famous band, in the history of music are from here. They were just four lads, who grew up

here! And all of the places where they grew up are still intact, and you can go and re-visit, and it gives you hope you know. Youngsters will gain inspiration from the fact that these four lads, who didn't have any money, were pretty much poverty stricken, although they didn't know it [...] They went on, just through sheer talent and hard work, to become, you know, the icons that they are.

The connection between Liverpool and the Beatles is not static, it is a social construction that took years to generate via the development of a thriving tourist industry, the refurbishment of many Beatles centric sites, and an increase in literary and documentary coverage examining the connection between the city and the band (Brocken 2015, 199). Many tourists view a visit to Liverpool and its Beatles-centric sites as simply a journey to experience the history of this unique location. However, for Beatles fans, a visit to the place that is so deeply connected to the object of their fandom has become an event that is akin to a religious pilgrimage to a sacred site (Heelas 1998, 5). Liverpool is no longer just a simple physical location for Beatles fans; the significance prescribed to the city has transformed it into a performance space imbued with different layers of symbolic personal investment. The act of pilgrimage to Liverpool creates a link between identity and place. Fandom is personal, as each fan fashions their own unique expression of a fandom identity that is based on their own personally devised construction of what the Beatles and Liverpool represent (Kruse 2005, 103; Jamal and Hill 2004, 359). Thus, when an individual is finally able to visit Liverpool, they are not only interacting with the physical manifestation of these sites but also with the construction of their own importance they have prescribed to the location (Jamal and Hill 2004, 359). In this act of place-centric pilgrimage the fan is engaging in sense-making and identity building. When interacting with a site that is important to them, the visitor is not only experiencing the physical place but is also given a chance to engage in the activities of sense-making and identity building, that in turn allows them to interact with and confirm their identities as Beatles fans (Jamal and Hill 2004, 359).

Before examining in depth how for fans, Liverpool based tourist locations function as sites of pilgrimage and places of identity confirmation, it is essential to understand that Liverpool Beatles sites are assigned meaning from a wide variety of sources. Laura Basu's essay, *Towards a Memory Dispositif: Truth, Myth and the Ned Kelly lieu de memoire 1890-1930*, provides a strong theoretical base for examining how a single tourist space can be inscribed with multiple representations, that can be interpreted differently depending on the individual visiting the site (2012, 139). Using the famous Australian outlaw Ned Kelly as a case study, Basu explores how memory sites can develop and function through the processes of mediation and remediation. Based on Pierre Nora's (1989) theory of lieux de memoire (literal or symbolic sites, where visitors go to experience and remember the past), and Michel Foucault's (1980) concept of dispositif (the connection between separate elements, whose interplay results in historical formations that produce power structures, knowledge, and subjectivity), Basu argues that it is possible to think of a memory site as a dispositif (2012, 141). By approaching the site as a dispositif composed of multiple assortments of media texts and experiences, Basu argues that memory sites can be repurposed, allowing different representations to become entwined, creating a site with numerous meanings that function as a mixed-media dispositif (Basu 2012, 153). Because multiple sources can be used to prescribe meaning to these tourist spaces, this

paper understands Beatles sites as both physical and imagined representations, that can be prescribed different layers of significance depending on the individual and the conglomeration of texts they are drawing on. Such as music history, tourism strategies, personal memory and fan narratives.

Cos I'm Going to Strawberry Fields: Sites of Beatles Pilgrimage and Fan Identity

Traditionally a pilgrimage denotes the act of travelling to a world-renowned holy site, invoking visions of the devout travelling to Mecca on Hajj, or those who flock to the Vatican to hear the Pope speak. However, these religious journeys represent only one configuration of pilgrimage. In the twenty-first century, as a result of evolving forms of travel, the types of journeys that can be classified as a pilgrimage have expanded (Hamling 2020, 11). As Dallen Timothy and Daniel Olsen highlight, a key element to a pilgrimage is not the destination, but rather the traveller's motivations (2006, 2). Spirituality is not confined to religious contexts, thus if an individual is travelling to a site that exists outside of their day-to-day lives, and that they perceive to be an embodiment of their personal beliefs and values, this act constitutes a pilgrimage (Heelas 1998; Timothy and Olsen 2006).

Using the theoretical definition of a pilgrimage laid out by Timothy and Olsen (2006), a trip to Liverpool can be analysed as being akin to a religious pilgrimage for Beatles fans. Many fans view these Liverpool sites as an embodiment of the Beatles history. To these individuals, places like St Peter's Church (where John Lennon and Paul McCartney first met), The Casbah Coffee Club (where the band first played), The Cavern Club (where the band gained fame and met their manager Brian Epstein), 20 Forthlin Road (the childhood home of Paul McCartney), Mendips (the childhood home of John Lennon), Strawberry Fields and Penny Lane (both Liverpool sites that inspired John and Paul to write songs of the same name) all have been prescribed meaning as sites that influenced the creation of the Beatles. Valerie, a local tour guide who gives speciality and customisable Beatles tours, builds on this idea; highlighting that for many individuals, visiting these spaces is an auspicious occasion. Valerie suggests that fans are finally being given the chance to experience this site for themselves, a space that they personally view as important due to its association with the Beatles.

They are places that they've known about for, many, many years, over 50 years, they are actually stood on the spot, maybe at the Penny Lane sign, or maybe at the Strawberry Fields gates, or [...] You know people do the National Trust Tour, of John and Pauls' houses and they can actually sit on the bed were John Lennon sat and dreamed about becoming the mega star that he did become.

Spaces associated with the Beatles within Liverpool are prescribed importance because they all sit in the broader discursive framework of Beatles lore, and therefore have been memorialised over time as significant sites in the bands past (Bremer 2006, 30). As Avril Maddrell suggests, memorialisation occurs when a space undergoes the process of communal and individual mapping, where meaning is inscribed on a specific site due to its connections to an important event or group (2010, 123). To those who understand the importance of these sites, a visit can be akin to a sacred journey (Bremer 2006, 30). In the case of Liverpool Beatles

sites, spaces are given meaning because of their connection to the Beatles past; they are sites that helped form and shape these four Liverpool lads into the Beatles, one of the world's most influential bands. Furthermore, for Beatles fans, these sites are imbued with a sense of importance or aura. Walter Benjamin defined aura as a quality integral to a work of art that can only be viewed in person (1936, 7). Beatles sites function in a similar fashion, as these spaces have been inscribed with meaning, especially within the fan community, and visiting these sites allows the fan to experience a sense of closeness to the band, enabling the visitor to share something that the Beatles once experienced (Rojek 2001, 12). This encounter is crucial because it allows the fan an opportunity to feel closer to the object of their devotion. Thea and Jeremy (who are Beatles fans themselves), highlight that for many individuals what makes a trip to Liverpool unique and distinct is the chance to interact with and experience the sites for themselves, to physically be in the city where it all started. Thea, a Beatles fan from America, said, 'So being in the actual place, where they were born, and they were hanging out, walking around, you know, theres a connection there that's really special.'

Jeremy, a Beatles fan from London, said, 'Since you listen to the music, and read the books, and know the history of them, and being here, in Liverpool in the place where they started [...] you feel that atmosphere, that's the thing, that's the connection.'

For fans like Thea and Jeremy, who have prescribed personal meaning to these Beatles sites, the act of visiting constitutes a pilgrimage. When touring these sites, fans are rewarded with an experience that is out of the ordinary; they have had an encounter that can only be felt within a place directly connected to the Beatles. This interaction between fan and a Beatles site has power, and can be an emotional moment. Valerie highlights the power of this interaction when she describes how monumental a visit to a Beatles site can be for some individuals:

It's the power that's built up in your imagination for years and years and years. And because I do it all the time, they've just become places I visit every single day. But I see it through the eyes of the people [...] It's places that you've always aspired to go, you've sang about them, you've seen pictures of them, you know history of them. And then at that moment, you're standing right next to that actual place. And it's... [At this point Valerie trails off, as she is lost for words on how to describe this feeling.]

Valerie's loss for words speaks volumes, because for fans the sensation of physically interacting with a site, is a powerful, personal and transformative experience. This feeling is created because the fans are able to connect with an environment they feel an emotional attachment towards (Digance 2006, 38). To fans, Liverpool has been built up as a mythical place; the city is not just a physical location, it is also the symbolic construction of the importance they have prescribed to the site (Tuan 2001, 86). Thus for fans, this act of pilgrimage is not only a physical voyage but an inner journey, as visiting these sites bestows the individual with the opportunity to connect to an essential aspect of their own identities: the part of them that is a Beatles fan.

In his seminal text *Textual Poachers* (1992), Henry Jenkins highlights that an essential aspect of fandom is that fans are emotionally invested in the pop culture content being produced. For many fans, the band has become an integral part of their lives. Over time personal meaning is

prescribed to the Beatles, their music, and other fan activities like knowledge gathering or object collection (Jenkins 1992, 52). For these individuals being a Beatles fan goes beyond an outward expression of something they love, for them the connection is more profound, their Beatles fandom is a vital part of how they construct their sense of self. Many of my interview participants touch on how being a Beatles fan is a constant part of who they are; fandom is now part of their identity.

I have been a fan of them for as long as I can remember, uh, I grew up listening to them. So it's just been a staple of my life for a very long time, I even have three Beatles tattoos, and I am working on getting the fourth one soon. (Loretta, Beatles fan from America)

I made a brave choice of changing countries, just because of the Beatles, I decided to learn English because of the Beatles [...] Like they are always going to be part of me, and do [...] I think like, a lot of the person I am is due to them as well. Ummm I am proud of the person I am, I mean I am a bit clumsy, a bit of a disaster and stuff, you know what I mean, but I think the words of the songs taught me a lot. I remember when I was a bit lonely, a teenager, I was one of the lonely kids, you know, and I used to like talk to the posters, you know what I mean, it seems a bit weird. But they have always been part of me. I still have that. I have a life sized cut out of Paul McCartney in my living room, and I will be like Hi, Paul you ok?" (Grace, Beatles fan originally from Spain who now works in Liverpool)

It's been one of those things in my life that's been constant, as a Beatles fan long before [...] like 14 years old, like excuse my language but when I saw them on *Ferris Bueller*, I was like who the heck is this? And it was like wow! And I had to find out more, you know? And you buy a tape with 'Twist and Shout' on it, and it, and you learn the other songs, and it just kinda grows from there. (Max, Beatles fan from Canada)

For Max, Grace, Loretta, and other Beatles fans like them, their fandom has become an essential aspect of how they construct their identity and sense of self (Jenkins 1992, 52; Theodoropoulou 2007, 317). In this sense, a pilgrimage to Liverpool is not just the physical excursion through the city, but also an inner journey, as visiting Beatles sites allows the fan to reconnect and reaffirm with the fandom driven aspect of their identity. This act of reconnection occurs when a fan makes a pilgrimage to a Beatles site, because while visiting, the individual uses their own experiences of fandom as a lens to contextualise and give meaning to the space. Traditionally, without some form of interpretation provided by a tour guide or informational signage, Liverpool Beatles sites would be meaningless to the casual tourist, as they are often unmarked (Sharpley and Stone 2009, 112). In contrast, fans give the site meaning by drawing on their own pre-formed understanding of the location that has been created due to their knowledge about the Beatles and Liverpool. An example of this can be seen when Rita, who is

married to Max, highlights that as a fan, Max can walk through the city of Liverpool without a guide, pointing out Beatles sites. ‘But walking down the street, Max has been like, “Oh that is where John and Paul had their picture taken on this album, or they did this here”’.

Grace builds on this, highlighting that when she visits Liverpool Beatles sites that provide a guide or have informational signage, such as Strawberry Fields, The Casbah Coffee Club, The Cavern Club, or the two Beatles-focused museums, she does not learn anything new, because she has already accumulated that knowledge over her years of fandom:

I have been into the Beatles since I was nine years old, and I am 26 now, so it has been quite a few years. Ummmm, I didn’t really learn much I am not going to lie, because I knew it all. Throughout those years [referencing her fandom] I had been reading books a lot, and I have been following them, so I didn’t really learn much.

When fans draw upon personal context to assign meaning to pilgrimage sites, they become active performers (Fry 2017, 56; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998, 195). To interact with and allocate importance to these pilgrimage sites, fans contextualise their own knowledge and experience of their own fandom (Young and Shooter 2020, 206). Drawing on their knowledge base allows the fan to feel closer to the Beatles while visiting these pilgrimage sites, as it grants them insider knowledge about the space. This knowledge then allows them to have a personal experience within these locations and subsequently helps confirm their fandom by creating a sense of closeness to the band, that then, in turn, grants the fans the ability to connect to the part of their identity that is a Beatles fan. Examples of how a fans inside knowledge, can create a personal experience can be seen when Grace, Max, and Thea talk about their experiences when they visited 20 Forthlin Road and Mendips.

Well, obviously where they grew up, is a beautiful tour, my favourite, the National Trust, where you can go inside the houses where John and Paul grew up. I am one of the lucky ones, I sat on John’s bed, and Paul’s bed – I shouldn’t be saying this, but I did sorry [referencing how she sat on the bed]. The National Trust Tour is amazing! So emotional, I have done it three-four times, each time it’s like, I was in tears, absolutely stunning. (Grace)

When we were at the house today, and I got to sit there in the piano seat, and before when I got up, I kind of ran my hand down the keys knowing that Paul McCartney played that piano, sat in that chair so that’s kind of like a bit of a connection there. Um and you know and in the living room [in Mendips] the one chair, I touched the seat knowing John Lennon had probably sat there, that’s kinda like [...] not freaky, but kinda like a connection thing to that, that they had done that, and things like that. But I am generally not one for [...] superstition, or something like that, but it’s really neat that they sat there and I kinda touched it or sat there [...] um I just kind of have that. (Max)

I did, the National Trust tour, which I think is the ultimate, because you get to go in their houses. And I have, like a really weird experience

with John's house. So, like, there was the porch that was covered, and had like a separate door, so it was like a room between the porch and the front door. And the lady, I forgot her name, the lady who takes care of the house, she told everyone to go stand in there and have a little sing song, because John's Aunt Mimi told him to go outside to sing because, it was too loud inside. So I went in, closed the door, and started singing "In Spite Of All The Danger", because I knew he would have sung that song there ... and the door locked on me! And that didn't happen to anyone else. So, it was like, whoa, John is here, I know it. That is what makes that tour amazing, you get to be in a place where they were standing, you know all that, yah, it's really cool. (Thea)

Grace divulged how each time she visits 20 Forthlin Road and Mendips, she takes the chance to sit down in Paul and John's bedrooms, an experience that repeatedly moves her to tears. Max, who got to run his hand across the set of piano keys Paul McCartney has played (including when he visited 20 Forthlin Road during the 2018 filming of *Carpool Karaoke* with James Corden) and touch a chair that John Lennon had sat in, had a set of experiences so profound, he could not find the words. Further, when Thea was locked within the covered porch of Mendips, she felt like John Lennon was somehow there with her. For Beatles fans Grace, Max, Thea, and others like them, moments like these, that take place within Beatles sites are deeply personal. The fans' understanding of the auspicious nature of the sites (that played a vital role in the history of the band) adds a sense of gravitas to these occasions. Deepening the sense that these sites and the experiences the fans underwent within them are so monumental, they are akin to being sacred (Bickerdike and Downing 2017, 199; Bremer 2006, 26).

The act of pilgrimage gives the fan a chance to interact with a site that they perceive as important because of its connection to the Beatles. Visiting these sites allows the fan the opportunity to come into contact with objects and environments that the band once experienced. These encounters help the fan foster a sense of closeness to the Beatles, as it creates a sense of a shared experience. This perception of intimacy, of visiting a space that has been transformed into a holy site due to its association with the Beatles, is only made possible because of the fans' own understanding and ability to contextualise this space. The capacity to understand the significance of the piano in the living room at 20 Forthlin Road, as an instrument Paul himself has played, or the emotions felt when visiting the childhood bedrooms of John and Paul, spaces where they would have composed songs such as *Please, Please Me* (Turner 2015, 31), are only made possible because of the fans' knowledge. This act of pilgrimage and sense of closeness the fan experience is key, because it is facilitating a connection to the fans' own sense of self.

In her work *Music in Everyday Life* (2000), Tia DeNora introduces the concept of a 'technology of the self' in which an individual's sense-of-self is constructed and mapped out over time through the process of identifying and linking their identity with pop-culture content such as music. Through the process of recall and life-mapping, each individual is able to compare their current 'technology of the self' to their past constructions, thus creating a chain that allows them to link their past selves to the person they are in the present (DeNora 2000, 48). In their work, *Popular Music Scenes and Cultural Memory*, Andy Bennett and Ian Rogers (2016)

expand on DeNora's theory, proposing that places can also function as 'technology of the self'. Bennett and Rogers argue that place plays a crucial role in the construction of the self because locations play a critical role in the creation and shaping of memories and an individual's sense of self (Bennett and Rogers 2016, 43; Brocken 2015, 3).

Using the argument proposed by Bennett and Rogers, a pilgrimage to the city of Liverpool, and the personal moments experienced by fans, can be conceptualised as part of the fan's construction of their 'technology of the self'. The fabrication of a connection between the city and the individual is attributed to the widespread fan practice of knowledge accumulation. As explored above, an important expression of fandom for many individuals is the acquisition of knowledge concerning the object of their devotion (Jenkins 1992). The city of Liverpool plays an essential role in the history of the Beatles; growing up in the city shaped the personality of the band members, inspired them to compose songs, and was the starting point of their rise to stardom (Kruse 2005, 87). This Beatles-Liverpool connection has ushered many fans to accumulate an encyclopaedic level of knowledge about the city and its relationship to the band. Many fans have been reading about the city and its Beatles related sites, for most of their lives. Thus many individuals have constructed their identity as Beatles fans partly around collecting information about these Liverpool sites. Therefore a pilgrimage to Liverpool allows a fan to confirm an aspect of their identity. The experience of physically encountering a Beatles site for themselves enables the fan to compare their previous technology of the self, a Beatles fan who is learning about and prescribing meaning to a location, to their current technology of the self, a Beatles fan who is physically experiencing the site in the present. Thus for fans, a Liverpool pilgrimage is not just a physical journey, it is also a personal exploration of the fans sense of self, as a visit to these sites enable the individual to reconfirm and connect with the part of their identity that is a Beatles fan.

Conclusion

On the world's stage, Liverpool has been recognised as the birthplace of the Beatles, thus creating the reputation in the fan community that Liverpool and its Beatles sites are a must-see for any loyal Beatles fans. To individuals who visit Liverpool and understand the significant role these sites played in influencing the careers and music of the Beatles, exploring these sites is akin to a descending on consecrated grounds (Bremer 2006, 30). While visiting Beatles sites, fans are given the opportunity to experience a circumstance that is out of the ordinary; as they have now had an encounter that can only be felt within a place directly connected to the Beatles. Thus for Beatles fans, a trip to Liverpool constitutes an act of pilgrimage, as visiting these sites gives the individual a way to interact with a place that is important to them.

A pilgrimage to Beatles sites is an auspicious event for fans because for these people being a Beatles fan goes beyond an outward expression of something they care about, for these individuals the association is more deep-rooted, as their Beatles fandom is a vital part of their identity (Jenkins 1992, 52). Beatles fans are active performers, as they often draw upon personal context to assign meaning to pilgrimage sites (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998, 195). During a visit to Beatles sites around Liverpool, the creation of a sense of closeness brought about by comprehension allows the fan to connect to their past selves in the present, thus

confirming their own identity. This article's focus is the examination of the links between place, pilgrimage, and identity in the context of Liverpool and the Beatles, consideration must be given to the supposition that this pattern may be repeated in other sites of pop-culture pilgrimage (for example in Nashville or at Graceland). If a personal connection gives rise to the creation of a distinctive site visit that fosters a link between sites of pilgrimage and sense of self, a deeper understanding of the relationship between place, identity and pilgrimage could be developed.

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