CHAPTER 7

The Spectacle of Alienation

Death, Loss, and the Crowd in *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*

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All the lonely people
Where do they all belong?
—Lennon and McCartney, "Eleanor Rigby"

See the people standing there who disagree and never win
And wonder why they don't get in my door.
—Lennon and McCartney, "Fixing a Hole"

*Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* comes to us accompanied by a thirty-five-year legacy of critical and fanzine commentary, of inanities such as the "Paul is Dead" conspiracy, of overdetermined interpretations, of our own memories, of references, allusions, and appropriations in mass media. It comes to us today as the original culture product, whose cover has been lampooned and honored by Frank Zappa and *The Simpsons*, and whose melodic strains show up in the music of acts as diverse as the Butthole Surfers and William Shatner. Whether we have just bought our first copy or are listening to it for the thousandth time, *Sgt. Pepper* comes to us, like literary and
cultural texts, as a work "already read." Criticism of the album generally eschews fanzine espousals of concepts and conspiracies for the de-historicized assumption of unity in Sgt. Pepper's audience.

Steve Turner concludes, "for anyone who was young at the time, the music automatically evokes the sight of beads and kaftans, the sound of tinkling bells and the aroma of marijuana masked by joss sticks" (144). Likewise in Beatlesongs, William Dowling asserts that "Sgt. Pepper not only changed pop music, but transformed how we perceived that music, and, in a very literal sense, how we perceived ourselves" (152). In Flowers in the Dustbin, James Miller reports his 1967 experience of hearing the album everywhere across the Occident as he traveled from California to Greece, an experience he says echoes Langdon Winner's trek across America at the time of Sgt. Pepper's release (344) and Kenneth Tynan's remark that the album was a "decisive moment in the history of Western civilization" (344). Miller counters "That release (344) and Kenneth Tynan's remark that the album was a "decisive moment in the history of Western civilization" (344). 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As their fame grew, so did their discomfort with celebrity. The wildness of Beatlemania and the rigors of Memphis and Manila forced them to confront their positions as individuals outside the Beatles' northwest, they realized that their celebrity afforded them the chance to air political beliefs. The Beatles found themselves in a position more elevated and enlightened than that of the masses, and although they roundly condemned the moralistic ideology of postwar England, they steadfastly tried to connect with the ordinary person on the street. In addition, the Beatles sensed the contradictions inherent in their part of the spectacle: they were at once protesting aspects of capitalism while promoting a product of image and music to be sold and accepted; they felt alienated from the crowd, yet they felt the need to express admiration and criticism of the extraspectacle crowd and to sell them records. As they developed worldviews differing greatly from those of Liverpool's working class, they made attempts at both reconciliation and provocation. Caught between loyalty to the working class and their position among the elite, the band members began to see their relationship to establishment culture as an antagonistic one as well. In Barry Miles's official biography, McCartney says they had the feeling that the “cusp . . . were on their way out, we were on the way in” (126). Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band in all its multiplicity represents a disparate set of responses to these contradictory, social forces. On the album, the Beatles explore and exploit the elements of performance and presentation in an attempt to control irresolvable social and personal issues.

From 1964 on, the lyrics of Lennon, McCartney, and Harrison return repeatedly to themes of death, loss, and alienation in connection with various crowds. "Eleanor Rigby" narrates the story of a lonely old woman whose funeral is unattended by the crowds of "lonly people" for whom she had fretted all her lonely life. Her alienation from the crowd and from herself reflects McCartney's pity for the masses, but it also evinces a growing concern with his place in relation to the crowd. Lennon's "In My Life" reflects bittersweetly on the "friends and lovers" of whom "some are dead and some are living." In Harrison's "Taxman," a response to British taxation, the dead have to "declare the pennies" holding down their lifeless eyelids. And Lennon's "Tomorrow Never Knows" is about Lennon's Leer-inspired and metaphorical attempt to "kill the ego," as he paraphrases Leary's invitation to LSD experimenters: "Turn off your mind, relax, and float downstream." Each of these songs is involved in a dialogue with the crowd, but none comes to a final resolution. The Sgt. Pepper sessions would become the space where the Beatles explored the limitations and possibilities of the spectacle.

Sources such as Mark Lewisohn's The Beatles: Recording Sessions tell us that the first real recording sessions for Sgt. Pepper began with no concept and only a few songs that Lennon and McCartney had written separately or were still writing. In November 1966, the Beatles met with George Martin at EMI's Abbey Road Studios. There they began the first of several versions of Lennon's "Strawberry Fields Forever." After finishing off McCartney's "When I'm Sixty-Four," they began work on "Penny Lane." In All You Need Is Ears, Martin says, "Sgt. Pepper originated with a song which was never on it" (199), and he expresses regret that "Strawberry Fields Forever" and "Penny Lane" were released as a double-A-sided single and that they were excluded from the final album.

But their place at the beginning of the Sgt. Pepper sessions indicates that early on, Lennon and McCartney were concerned with questions of identity and the spectacle. "Strawberry Fields," where "nothing is real," sees Lennon contemplating his place among the people, and "Penny Lane" finds McCartney searching out his fellow-creatures via a "barber showing photographs," a "nurse . . . selling poppies from a tray," a "fireman" holding "an hourglass," and a banker who "never wears a mac." Each song is a nostalgic, utopian version of its author's boyhood Liverpool: an area known as Penny Lane and the garden of an orphanage named Strawberry Field.

As much as these tunes are about warm memories, those memories are of a time now lost, when Lennon and McCartney could have walked through the area without the hassle of fans. Both songs reflect an era before they found themselves directly involved in the spectacle of celebrity. By late 1966, exclusion and conditional inclusion seem to be their answer to the crowd. In "Strawberry Fields Forever" Lennon begins, "Let me take you down, cause I'm going to Strawberry Fields. / Nothing is real, and nothing to get hung about." A lover of puns, Lennon invites the listener to enter into a world where "nothing is real" and where nothing will cause "hang-ups"—or possibly a place where no one would get hanged to death for their differences. As quickly as he invites his listener to come along, however, he sings that "no one" is in his "tree" and that "you can't, you know, tune in, but it's all right."

Lennon's feelings of superiority, clashed violently with his urge to champion the working class and to acknowledge his own working-class roots. Until the end, Lennon bemoaned the furor of Beatlemania, and in his last Rolling Stone interview, he showed that he still felt ambivalent about the crowd, even about the elite crowd involved in the Cultural Revolution:

For the few of us who did question what was going on . . . I have found out personally—not for the whole world—that I am responsible for it, as well as them. I am part of them. There's no separation; we're all one, so in that
respective, I look at it all and think, "Ah, well, I have to deal with me again in that way. What is real? What is the illusion I'm living or not living?" And I have to deal with it every day. (qtd. in Cott and Dowd 191)

Meanwhile, back in late 1966, he sang of the place of the unreal as a space separate from the world of spectacle. And though MacDonald classifies it as "another of Lennon's hallucinogenic ventures into the mental interior" and a continuation of Lennon's fascination with Leary (173–74), its language is simple. Its complexities grow out of the gaps in Lennon's view of the spectacle and the crowd. In the end, Lennon invites the crowd to investigate something they cannot understand, to appreciate his brilliance, but to enjoy the journey vicariously through him—even though cognition will fail them. In the end, the spectacle is Lennon's own genius.

Although the song excludes the crowd, we know from the Anthology recordings that it started as a folksy ballad in what Lennon would have considered the more direct style of Dylan. The final recording comprised two versions of the song in different keys and recorded a week apart. The final version of the song is a hybrid, melded together via the studio ingenuity of George Martin and engineer Geoff Emerick. Ironically, the song's text was meant to be a "direct" address to the audience and clashed with Lennon's ideals. As Walter Everett (1999) says, "it must be remembered that Lennon was genuine in his lifelong adulation for the most simplistic and visceral rock and roll" (10); at this point, Lennon was just learning the potential of avant-garde techniques for political protest. Even though he admitted shortly after the Beatles' demise that Sgt. Pepper was "a peak," he also revealed his dissatisfaction with Strawberry Fields," saying, "I don't like production so much" (Lennon Remembered 138). "Locked" into what Jameson calls "the category of the individual subject" (Political Unconscious 68), Lennon attempted to reproduce the "sincerity" of his American influences, but this folksy approach conflicted with the song's experimentation—and with the crowd to whom he "directly" sang. Both "Strawberry Fields Forever" and "Penny Lane" see the Beatles furthering their engagement with orchestral music—a trend that would become cliché by the end of 1967 and one that would create tension during the recording of Sgt. Pepper.

**Performing the Distance, Distancing the Performance**

"Sgt. Pepper," the souped-up reprise, "Getting Better," "When I'm Sixty-Four," "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds," and "With a Little Help from My Friends" set a sunny, seemingly unified tone for the rest of the album. Yet the concept for the song "Sgt. Pepper," the eventual album title, and the packaging of the album made it all seem more cohesive than is obviously true. The packaging of Sgt. Pepper, its gatefold sleeve, cardboard cutouts, and printed lyrics were firsts in the industry, and they were a concerted effort to sell the product to the masses. The cover's printed lyrics indicated the Beatles' self-confidence as artists, and it indicated a desire to preach to the masses—to praise and condemn them for their parts in the spectacle.

Guy Debord's 1967 theorization of "the spectacle" might help us to understand the Beatles' relation to celebrity and the crowd. Debord explains, "all the life of societies in which modern conditions of production reign announces itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. All that is directly experienced is distanced in a representation" (3). And whereas the spectacle projects an appearance of unity, it is the "alpha and omega" of "separation" (13), the heart of ir-realism in the real society" (5), the "contrary of dialogue" (9), and the omnipresent choice—already made—in the production, and its corollary consumption" (5). Debord says that the spectacle is "not an ensemble of images, but a social rapport, mediated by images" (4). He portrays a self-interested media age, which is, as Jameson tells us, organized by the "faceless" masters in a new age of burgeoning multinational corporations in which the "restraints" of hegemonic power structures "are reproduced by the culture industry" (Postmodernism 17). Debord, however, points out that in the struggle against such totality, one has to "speak in the language of the spectacle" to criticize it, implying that struggle from within was possible. The Beatles found themselves fighting the spectacle from within, and McCartney had an idea that would give them a way to separate themselves from spectacle and its spectacle crowds.

After coming up with the concept for the album, McCartney wrote the title song as a quasi-direct statement to the crowd and as an indirect reproach of England's and the United States' involvement in Asia. Whereas he had previously sung from the third-person point of view, his use of identity becomes more complex by 1966. Sgt. Pepper was an attempt to appease his and Lennon's rock sensibilities, but it was also an effort to reconcile social conflicts and unite Beatles and fans in the spectacle while practically distancing them. In a 1984 interview with Playboy, McCartney says that Sgt. Pepper "was an idea I had, I think, when I was flying from L.A. to somewhere. I thought it would be nice to lose our identities, to submerge ourselves in the persona of a fake group. We would make up all the culture around it and collect all our heroes in one place" (qtd. in Dowlding 159).

Lennon helped to explain McCartney's rationale for creating the band's alter egos. He says that McCartney was looking for a name such as those en vogue on the California scene:

Fred and His Incredible Shrinking Grateful Airplanes... He was trying to put some distance between the Beatles and the public—and so there was this identity of Sgt. Pepper. Intellectually, that's the same thing he did by writing "she loves you" instead of "I love you." (Anthology 241)
As Allan Moore reminds us in his book-length analysis of *Sgt. Pepper*, "the spectacle of celebrity was growing in London, and popular culture had become central, symbolized by the arrival of 'celebrities' [who] were primarily famous simply for being famous" (*Beats 11*). The Beatles were always suspicious of mass adulation, although they also realized such adulation had to be sustained. Lennon commented shortly after the group stopped touring in 1966, "I reckon we could send out four waxwork dummies of ourselves and that would satisfy the crowds. Beatles concerts are nothing to do with music any more. They're just bloody tribal rites" (*Anthology* 329).

They felt that their performances were suffering and that the Beatles roles Brian Epstein had assigned them had become too restrictive, publicly and privately, John and George had begun to speak out about their opposition to the Vietnam War, but their reluctance to hurt sales in the United States must certainly have created tensions in their public and private thoughts. In any case, it helped to create the conditions by which McCartney envisioned *Sgt. Pepper* and his band as a means of bridging the gaps—but also of creating others. The cover featured those wax effigies of them—to the side, in mourning clothes—a representation of the distance the band was putting between themselves and the spectacular image of Mop-Top Beatles. As McCartney explains:

> We were fed up with being the Beatles. We really hated that fucking four little Mop-Top boys approach. We were not boys, we were men. It was all gone, all that boy shit, all that screaming, we didn't want any more, plus, we'd now got turned on to pot and thought of ourselves as artists rather than just performers... Then suddenly on the plane I got this idea. I thought, Let's not be ourselves. Let's develop alter egos so we're not having to project an image which we know. (qtd. in Miles 303)

The Beatles usually toyed with identity, playing under various incarnations as the Quarry Men, Johnny and the Moondogs, the Silver Beetles, the Silver Beatles, and the Ndk Twins. McCartney, under the name "Bernard Webb," had penned the number-one record "Woman" for Peter and Gordon. And Richard Starkey always worked under his professional alias "Ringo Starr."

"Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band" opens with a string ensemble that never disappears. Its classical replacement, a brass band, plays its music to an audience laughing inexplicably over the band's foregrounded solo. It implies the loss and rebirth of a time past—"20 years ago," before the band began "going in and out of style"—and makes an ingenious invitation: "We'd like to take you home with us. We'd love to take you home." The song's ambivalence toward the crowd is also seen in its mock apology, "I don't really want to stop the show." An overture sets the stage for a brass band—which seems (but is not necessarily) comprised of *Sgt. Pepper's* players, whose members perform an antiquated march over distorted and tightly compressed power chords. Although the song represents an ingenious pairing of high and low culture, the establishment and burgeoning youth culture, it is also a provocation to the unhip. Rather than reinstating the status quo, it insists on pulling it into its world of youth culture rock. The song remains rock but the horns do not remain classical. The song's backing vocals are appropriations of Motown and Beach Boys harmonies, and they are punctuated by the bluesy sevenths that Lennon and McCartney associated with rock 'n' roll. In "Sgt. Pepper" the Beatles distance themselves from the spectacle, conditionally inhabiting *Sgt. Pepper* and his band, withdrawing to the distance as creators and artists, omniscient and firmly rooted in rock.

Obviously, inherent contradictions are found in such a method. Some saw *Sgt. Pepper* and its cover as a nod to the establishment. Iconoclast Frank Zappa made that point abundantly clear via the parodic *Sgt. Pepper* cover on his 1968 release, with the album's title, *We're Only in It for the Money*, emblazoned across *Sgt. Pepper*'s bass drum, surrounded by Zappa, his Mothers of Invention, and the images of Jimi Hendrix, Castro, and Lee Harvey Oswald at the moment in which Jack Ruby shot him. This sort of criticism and a belief in rock's directness prompted Lennon to dismiss some of his own songs on *Sgt. Pepper* as "poetic" (*Lennon Remembers* 40). As for the *Sgt. Pepper* concept, Lennon says, "You see, Paul said come and see the show, I didn't. I said, 'I read the news today oh boy'" (40).

Nevertheless, McCartney viewd the title song and its eventual (if loose) concept as a mockery of contemporary England's antiquated Edwardian values and Western involvement in the Vietnam War. George Martin insists that the military aspect of *Sgt. Pepper* "was partly a send-up of the U.S. in Vietnam." (qtd. in Moore, *Beats 21*). Sheila Whiteley (*The Space between the Notes*) points out that "by wearing the uniform of the past within the context of a psychedelically charged album, *Sgt. Pepper* undercuts traditional values and the military man becomes yet another showman, a figure of fun" (41). Zappa's reading shows that some listeners took the military wear as an endorsement of England's imperial past and present. As album designer Peter Blake says in the CD's liner notes, Jesus, Gandhi, and Hitler almost made it into the images of heroes and celebrities dotting the album's cover, but were nixed as being too controversial. The final group of people featured on the cover (everyone from Muhammad Ali to Lenny Bruce) speaks not of inclusivity, but of select heroes. The average citizenry of "Penny Lane" is nowhere in evidence here. The Beatles had come to see themselves as having something to say; they and their music take center stage, surrounded by great thinkers and great celebrities.

"With a Little Help from My Friends" furthers the appearance of unity, and it may be the song most responsible for the feeling that *Sgt. Pepper* is about unity. Cowritten by Lennon and McCartney, this composition is the first song on the album to avowedly endorse marijuana, although it was
recorded a considerable time after "A Day in the Life" and its mantra, "I'd love to turn you on." And although critics may belittle such behavior, cannabis's contemplative properties seem to have encouraged the Beatles in their questioning of the spectacle and its position to the repressive strictures of the establishment. In keeping with the crowd, "With a Little Help" expresses the singer's (perhaps for real in Ringo's case) fear of losing the audience by singing off-key. But again, the Beatles put distance between the singer and the spectacle. Within the performance on the record, it is understood that conditions of studio recording will prevent the record from coming out with Ringo singing terribly off-key. The question, "Would you stand up and walk out on me?" is, then, a rhetorical statement based on the broader question of identity. As with the title song, the crowd remains on the outside, let in only as a spectacle attendee. The introductory segue is reminiscent of the introduction to the earlier hit "Eight Days a Week" and seems to appeal to Beatlemaniacs. Added later, it is a brave contrast to their new sound, but it represents a firm goodbye to the Beatles' past, and, presumably, to its audience.

In "Getting Better," Lennon's lines of regret over his past misogyny contrast with McCartney's sunny optimism, which truly seems to be in order as the speaker compares past and present ways of thinking and behaving. He contrasts his brilliance and psychedelic openness against the brutal stupidity of the teachers "who weren't cool" and who tried to fill them up with "rules." Still, the song rings a plaintive note of alienation in personal relationships, implying that directness and free love are the answers. But not everyone is welcome in this world. McCartney brings the song to a peak, singing in his best rock 'n' roll voice about the "people standing there who disagree and never win and wonder why they don't get in my door."

"She's Leaving Home" and "When I'm Sixty-Four" are often cited as songs that bridge different generations of Beatles listeners. MacDonald says, "The Beatles offered an inclusive vision, which, among other things, worked to defuse the tensions of the generation gap" (185). The truth of this may be that audiences have mainly perceived it as a gap-shoring album, but the songs show obvious splits with establishment culture and the crowd. "She's Leaving Home" is a story told partly by an "objective" third-person narrator and partly by first-person narrators (the girl's parents). The third-person narrator speaks directly of what has happened, whereas the parents' selfish responses expose their morality. The narrator judges their punishment to be a significant one: their daughter is running away with someone from the lower class and will obviously gain sexual experience. McCartney clearly saw the antiquated ballad as a means to promote the youth rebellion, but this kind of ditty creates tensions among the band members, who suspected such work as "soft."

"When I'm Sixty-Four" was written as a sincere tribute to McCartney's aging father James, and its rooty-toot style makes it seem a tribute to the older generation. But many critics have pointed out that the song pokes fun at the music and ideals of the time. The song's first-person narrator is a young man, presumably in the 1920s, proposing to an unnamed woman, asking her for a lifetime guarantee. His attempts to get her to "fill in" a "form" and "indicate precisely" what she "mean[s] to say" point to his dumb, uncarnal innocence. This innocence here is not looked at with nostalgic warmth; instead, it stands as one with staid Britannica and its unnatural ideology. McCartney establishes a dichotomy resonant with Romanticism. The staid mores of the establishment generation are as unnatural as the spectacle. Indirect speech is spectacle speech, whereas rock speech and youth culture operate under the laws of nature. As with "She's Leaving Home," "When I'm Sixty-Four" allows the narrative to emerge from an establishment point of view. And like its counterpart, it ultimately speaks of a generational standoff. As MacDonald reminds us, "the 'generation gap' which opened in the Fifties turns out not to be a quarrel between a particular set of parents and children but an historical chasm between one way of life and another" (25). However inclusive the album seemed in effect, songs such as "She's Leaving Home" and "When I'm Sixty-Four" are not meant as dialogue with the album's other fare. The speaker in "When I'm Sixty-Four" evinces a deep attachment, a nostalgia even, for an increasingly distant and romanticized past, whereas the narrator in "Lovely Rita" enjoys himself with "a sister or two" while Rita busies herself elsewhere. The contrast could not be more striking.

**STUCK INSIDE THE CROWD**

Near the end of the sessions for the album, Harrison composed and recorded "Within You Without You" without the other Beatles and with the accompaniment of an Indian quartet playing traditional Indian instruments. His quickly dispatched "Only a Northern Song," a dark and comic in-joke about the band's publishing contract, was rejected for the album. Leaving the theme of economics, Harrison chose to sing of his new philosophy in the form of a sermon. Everett (1999) says that around the time of Sgt. Pepper, "Harrison immersed himself in all things Indian, turning from Leary to Yogananda to the Bhagavadgita" (98)—referring to the swami whose teachings Harrison read alongside the Vedas. In an even fuller integration of Indian music than in Revolver's "Love You To," "Within You Without You" presents its audience with a religion meant to supplant Christianity. It shows Harrison taking control of the Beatles' transcendental discourse. In later years, Harrison expressed doubt over whether Lennon, composer of "Tomorrow Never Knows," had understood his own lyrics (Anthology 210). He continues, setting the record straight about what Lennon's song meant:

The whole point is that we are the song. The self is coming from a state of pure awareness, from the state of being. All the rest that comes about in the
outward manifestation of the physical world... is just clutter. The true nature of each soul is pure consciousness. So the song is really about transcending and about the quality of the transcendent. (210)

In an interview with *Melody Maker* around the time of *Sgt. Pepper*, Harrison defended the Beatles against charges that they were skirting reality. "Reality is a concept," he says, and:

Everybody has their own reality (if they are lucky). Most people’s reality is an illusion, a great big illusion... I am not George. ... The physical body will pass but this bit in the middle, that’s the only reality. All the rest is the illusion, so to say that somebody thinks that we, the ex-Beatles, are removed from reality is their personal concept. (44)

For all its mysticism and manufactured mystery, "Within You Without You" is a clear and direct song that bemoans "the space between us all / And the people—who hide themselves behind a wall of illusion." The song contains one of the most humane lines on the album with Harrison singing, "with our love—we could save the world—if they only knew." He places himself among the crowd, "within" whom and "without" whom "life flows on," but again, "they" refers to the unenlightened crowds of Beatlemania and of the establishment. Harrison’s space, like McCartney’s in "Fixing a Hole," is reserved for the initiated and enlightened.

Part of Harrison’s message is the idea that life is transitory and that death is just another condition, nothing to get hung up about. Its message, that death is simply another concept such as reality, is itself a retreat from reality, but it is also an indirect response to those in power orchestrating the Vietnam War. The inexplicable laughter at song’s end echoes the laughter in the title track. Here, however, classical (Eastern) culture is not being mocked. If anything, the laughter is directed at the establishment culture that the song condemns. Still, this instance and the laughter in "Sgt. Pepper" remain inexplicable, opening questions for the listener, who is only conditionally admitted to this summer spectacle of love.

**OPENING THE MIND, CLOSING THE DOOR**

Because "Strawberry Fields Forever" was not released on *Sgt. Pepper*, Lennon’s contribution to the album proper may seem less significant than McCartney’s. Timewise this may be true, but Lennon’s songs, even "A Day in the Life," helped to add a more textured, bluesier edge to the album’s overall impression. Whereas "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds" may begin as a near waltz, its title refrain reestablishes the distorted guitars heard in "Sgt. Pepper." Lennon’s songs show an engagement with the spectacle equally as powerful as McCartney’s, and they reveal a greater concern with issues of class and the crowd.

Lennon and McCartney had similar childhoods: both lost their mothers during their teen years, and each came from working-class homes with middle-class aspirations. As McCartney recounts, his mother and father "aspired to a better life. That idea that we had to get out of here, we had to do better than this. This was okay for everyone else in the street but we could do better than this" (Miles 6). Lennon was always more openly class-conscious than McCartney and always betrayed his personal conflicts when discussing class issues. Explaining his politics in the last *Playboy* interview, Lennon says:

In England, there are only two things to be, basically: You are either for the labor movement or for the capitalist movement. Either you become a right-wing Archie Bunker if you are in the class I am in, or you become an instinctive socialist, which I was. That meant I think people should get their false teeth and their health looked after, all the rest of it. But apart from that, I worked for money and I wanted to be rich. So what the hell—if that’s a paradox, then I’m a socialist. But I am not anything. What I used to be is guilty about money. That’s why I lost it, either by giving it away or by allowing myself to be screwed by so-called managers. (*All We Are Saying* 94)

Lennon’s views were obviously not so clearly defined in 1966 and 1967, but even in 1980, he still felt the need to justify his separation from the masses.

Whereas McCartney’s response to the Beatles’ class conflicts found their nonresolve in identity play, Lennon mistrusted such trickery. Such mistrust emanated from his wariness of avant-garde art and techniques (even though they had been used extensively on his *Revolver* work), from his rock ‘n roll consciousness, and from the conflicts between working-class rock culture and high-culture, educated-class aspects of avant-garde work. According to all accounts, until McCartney’s consistent urging and later Yoko Ono’s influence, Lennon had little interest in the avant-garde and its forms of expression. In the *Playboy* interview he says that "A Day in the Life," "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds," and "Strawberry Fields Forever" were written under pressure after McCartney surprised him with the November recording date. He also maintains that part of his resentment toward McCartney stems from the experiments of *Sgt. Pepper*. With such experiments, he claims, McCartney "subconsciously" attempted to "destroy" his rock ‘n roll (*All We Are Saying* 192).

"Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds" is perhaps the album’s most (in)famous song, mostly because of its accidental acronym "LSD." Its title taken from Julian Lennon’s drawing of a kindergarten playmate, "Lucy" again finds Lennon returning to the theme of the crowd. Whiteley (*The Space between the Notes*) claims that in the song, "The singer takes on the role of experienced user and in the verse leads the novice... into a changed reality" (43). Although I do not
doubt Whiteley's claim about LSD's influence on the progression of images in the song, the political subtext is more complex. MacDonald has documented Timothy Leary's theories and their influence on Lennon and the hallucinogenic philosophy in Lennon's work. Even Lennon dismissed his narcotic thinking at the time. In his retrospective post-Beatles interviews with Jann Wenner, Lennon says:

I got a message on acid that you should destroy your ego, and I did. I was reading that stupid book of Leary's and all that shit. We were going through a whole game that everyone went through. And I destroyed myself...I didn't believe I could do anything. (Lennon Remembers 53-54)

All four Beatles were experienced pot smokers by Sgt. Pepper and felt a certain freedom to refer to it explicitly on the album and in public: "I get high with a little help from my friends," "Went upstairs and took a smoke," and "I'd love to turn you on." But "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds" is also a continuation of the spectacle contained in Sgt. Pepper. Its images of "newspaper taxis" (McCartney's line, according to Lennon) and a "girl with kaleidoscope eyes" tell a story of alienation and loss. Lennon says the images of the song:

were from Alice in Wonderland. It was Alice in the boat. She is buying an egg and it turns into Humpty Dumpty. The woman serving in the shop turns into a sheep and the next minute they are rowing in a rowing boat somewhere and I was visualizing that. There was also the image of the female who would someday come save me--a "girl with kaleidoscope eyes" who would come out of the sky. (All We Are Saying 181)

However the public read the song, Lennon was trying to create a space apart from reality, outside the very spectacle he was creating. In the first verse, the song asks the listener to "picture yourself in a boat on a river, / with tangerine trees and marmalade skies." The language is childlike, but unlike "Strawberry Fields," it lets the audience see what the singer is seeing. Instead of offering a vision of the past, it plants the listener in a fantasy. Here, "rocking horse people eat marshmallow pies"; "Newspaper taxis" actually "wait"; and "Everyone smiles as you drift by the river." The song ends with a surprise for the journeying imaginer: "Suddenly someone is there at the turnstile, / the girl with kaleidoscope eyes." This song, mostly of Lennon's doing, allows the crowd to intrude, but only for a visionary moment. Here, the ability to imagine sets him apart from the crowd. The sudden arrival of a savior with kaleidoscope eyes is a personal cry for help, lost in the images of the spectacle. But the song is ultimately fantasy. And like "Strawberry Fields," it allows the listener no closer behind the mask of the Sgt. Pepper spectacle.

Similarly, "Being for the Benefit of Mr. Kite," a song that Lennon took almost verbatim from an old circus poster, presents another spectacle within the spectacle. Placed on the album after "She's Leaving Home," the song brilliantly melds the sounds of calliopes and organs with the beat-heavy rock combo. "Being for the Benefit of Mr. Kite" is an antiquated advertisement promising danger in the "hogshead of real fire" that awaits the "men and horses." Here, Lennon highlights the spectacle, but the listener is not the audience of the circus; the listener remains on the outside of the crowd that is beckoned to see "Mr. K" as he prepares to "challenge the world." The circus Barker's pitch is made to an audience that never was, invited to a show that never will be, and he sells sensationalism (as any good Barker would). While he sells the show, he addresses the crowd aggressively, telling them "Don't be late!" and warning them, "Mr. K performs his tricks without a sound." Even when he claims, "Messrs. K and H. assure the public / their production will be second to none," he keeps the crowd at a distance by addressing them ("the public") through the indirect voices of "Messrs. K and H." Lennon's circus is a maelstrom of distance between the crowd and the performer. The crowd that thrives on spectacle, but pays its money (the "benefit of Mr. Kite"), must be kept in its place. The Barker, like Lennon, was intent on keeping the crowd at bay.

In "Good Morning Good Morning," Lennon borrows again, here from a Kellogg's cereal ad slogan, a sound bite of the growing media culture. The ad's sunny message, however, is undercut by the doctor's diagnosis, "Nothing to do to save his life, call his wife in." But this situation sits beside other "everyday" morning activities. In this particular world, though, the second-person "you" (whom we assume is not the doctor) heads out to "roam," but:

Everybody knows there's nothing doing
Everything is closed it's like a ruin
Everyone you see is half asleep.
And you're on your own you're in the street

The world of "Good Morning Good Morning" is a place where you are eventually "on your own" because of the dimwitted crowd who is "half asleep." The lyrics end with "you" being saved by the possibility of a romantic liaison, but this resolution seems half-hearted after the diagnosis of death in the opening lines. At the song's conclusion, taking the Beach Boys' Pet Sounds' and its use of animal noises one step further, Lennon sent a subtle message to the "half-asleep." Lewisothe reports that John had decided that he would like to end his song with animal sound effects, and asked that they be compiled in such a way that each successive animal was capable of frightening or devouring its predecessor" (Complete 250). Subtle though that message might be, this
song’s concluding food-chain romp is directed at the “half-asleep” and is analogous to the implied “late-comers” of Mr. Kite’s circus.

Interestingly, in his two books of witticisms, Lennon had pitted such a crowd against the individual, most notably in the story entitled “The Wum­berlog” in the book *A Spaniard in the Works*, which tells the story of a young boy in search of the “Wumberlog”—people “Wot lived when they were dead” (126). A “carrot” (shades of Alice) leads him to the Wumberlogs, who are digging industriously at the boy’s grave. As they throw the dirt over him, they mock him by “shouting out ‘I’m a madman from the sky’” (132). The cliché of the crowd’s “toast” is seen as a cruel gesture. As comic as it is, it shows Lennon’s conflicting feelings about the crowd.

Although he dismissed much of his work on *Sgt. Pepper*, he was proud of “A Day in the Life,” even up to the end. I mean to imply neither that Lennon was wholly reluctant to experiment with his songs, nor that McCartney was the reigning genius of *Sgt. Pepper*. Lennon must have been somewhat open to the avant-garde techniques McCartney espoused or “A Day in the Life” would not have happened. Lennon and McCartney wrote the two main sections as separate songs, and only after they started to integrate them did they come up with the idea for the track’s orchestral transitions. Recorded immediately after the orchestral experiments of “Strawberry Fields” and “Penny Lane,” “A Day in the Life” revisits the Beatles’ engagement with classical instrumentation, and thus, establishment culture. Turning the recording session into a party, they and friends Mick Jagger and Marianne Faithfull handed out joints, flowers, and silly costumes to the orchestra. On the orchestral score, the band had written, “From here, you’re on your own,” referring to their loose instructions for the orchestra (*Anthology* 247). Alternating conducting chores with George Martin, Paul wore a kitchen apron while leading the orchestra. Although the Beatles were most certainly not mocking the musicians in attendance, they were satirizing the orchestra’s position as establishment culture. The Beatles always saw themselves in competition, and they strove with songs such as “A Day in the Life” to earn the recognition from the very establishment that they themselves rejected. For all the awards and recognition the Beatles earned, Lennon and Harrison felt justifying their own legitimacy as musicians in opposition to trained players necessary; McCartney and Starr continue to admit their lack of technical ability, but boast of their home-grown talents, staple claims of legitimate rock musicians. A final, somber, and enduring piano chord (recorded on multiple pianos by Martin, Lennon, McCartney, and Starr) concludes “A Day in the Life.” Almost two weeks after the song was finished, “A Day in the Life” received its final piano chords. But just as the tuning (thus, out-of-tune) orchestra is excluded from “Sgt. Pepper,” the orchestra is excluded here from those final piano chords. The Beatles have taken control of a classical instrument, and the orchestra is forgotten. The song is followed by the repetitive “run out” sample, from which a voice sings of those who “never do see any other way” or who are “never to see any other way.” On the original album, the “run out” has a repeating groove, and the message repeats eternally to the “half-asleep.” From beginning to end, the Beatles have classified and ordered the crowd.

Part of what was expected of the crowd was their understanding of the Beatles’ experimentation with drugs. When working on the transitions in “A Day in the Life,” Lennon and McCartney chose to openly state, “I’d love to turn you on.” Lennon and Harrison were eventually arrested for small amounts of narcotics—albeit small amounts that, in the late 1960s, carried the threat of jail time. McCartney’s ten days in a jail in Japan testify to the fact that much of the world did not (and continue not to) want to be turned on. In the 1960s, marijuana use was clearly taboo in most minds of establishment England. McCartney says that coming up with and singing “I’d love to turn you on” was liberating, similar to writing about “sexual” matters (Miles 325). But as its title implies, “A Day in the Life” is about the diurnal and mundane, at least on the surface. Even death is seen as mundane because the focus is on the crowd, not on the death. Lennon’s sections of the song come from the point of view of Lennon himself reading the newspaper. In the *Playboy* interview, Lennon explains:

> Just as it sounds: I was reading the paper one day and I noticed two stories. One was the Guinness heir [Tara Browne, a Beatle acquaintance] who killed himself in a car. That was the main headline story. He died in London in a car crash. On the next page was a story about 4,000 holes in Blackburn, Lancashire. In the streets, that is. They were going to fill them all. . . . I thought it was a damn good piece of work. (*All We Are Saying* 183-84)

The crowd in the song is a spectacle crowd, who “stood and stared” at the young upper-class man. They gaze at his death not out of pity, but out of a fascination with sensationalism. The crowd views death as a spectacle, and Lennon presents the crowd as the spectacle itself. Whereas they were absent in “Mr. Kite” and nestled out of view in “Good Morning Good Morning,” here they are present, yet mesmerized, by the spectacle. Browne is no longer a person, but is instead a prop in the spectacle, his death tacitly equated with such other events as the discovery of how many potholes “it takes to fill the Albert Hall.” The song’s anthem “I’d love to turn you on” may refer to drugs, but it is also Lennon’s message to the half-asleep masses, inviting them to enlightenment. As MacDonald astutely remarks, “A Day in the Life” is a “song not of disillusionment with life itself but of disenchantment with the limits of mundane perception. [It] depicts the ‘real world’ as an unenlightened construct that reduces, depresses, and ultimately destroys” (181). In many ways, this is precisely why *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* remains a cultural product continually “reread” over and over again in our popular culture, and in our private homes, with a story to tell of class-consciousness and class conflict, as well as of love, peace, unity, and rebellion.
NOTES

1. Shatner’s inadvertently comic version of “Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds” has become a cult favorite.

2. See the Beatles Anthology (219–21) for additional discussion regarding the traumas that beset the band during their 1966 world tour.


4. For additional discussion of the producer’s experiences during the Sgt. Pepper sessions, see Martin’s With a Little Help from My Friends.


6. All of the Debord quotations are my translations of his original French text.

7. McCartney would create a similar set of characters (the “Jailer Man” and “Sailor Sam”) for Wings’ 1973 album, Band on the Run.

8. The cover was only officially released in 1995, when Ryko reissued Zappa’s album.

9. In Many Years from Now, McCartney tells Barry Miles that his father, Jim McCartney, was happy for his son because technology had perfected contraception and hence allowed the younger generation to enjoy sex in a more liberated fashion. McCartney describes the sexual freedom of the 1960s as equivalent to Moses’s “parting” of the sea with the waters coming back down with the rise of fatal STDs in the 1980s (142–43).

10. In his final Playboy interview, Lennon claims that the “girl” in his song was his premonition of meeting Yoko Ono.

11. This ensemble’s appearance could have explained the audience’s laughter in Sgt. Pepper had they been, indeed, the brass band of the title song.