Performing Countercultural Masculinity
Mick, Music and Masquerade in *Gimme Shelter*

By AMANDA HOWELL

[1] Years before MTV, baby boomer audiences consumed images of themselves in widely popular rockumentaries that have since become key documents in our understanding of youth and music cultures of the past. In particular, the 1970 film *Gimme Shelter*, directed by Albert and David Maysles with Charlotte Zwerin, has been central to popular understanding of the rise and, especially, the fall of the hippie movement at the end of the 1960s. A film that has influenced popular periodization of the youth movement in the U.S. with its depiction of the Rolling Stones' 1969 tour and its tragic conclusion at Altamont, *Gimme Shelter* is likewise noteworthy for its portrayal of the Stones'--especially Mick Jagger's--staging of rock masculinity in the context of the youth counterculture. Culminating in the harrowing final sequence of the film, where Jagger's performance falls apart before our eyes, his control of the stage yielding to a welter of confused, frightened, and angry youth, Jagger's countercultural rock masculinity--like the free rock festival at Altamont itself--appears as a failed experiment in the transformative power of youth and music cultures.

[2] Responding to Pauline Kael's accusation that they had incited "violent acts on camera," Zwerin and the Maysles insisted that "the structure of the film. . . tries to render in its maximum complexity the very problems of Jagger's double self, of his insolent appeal and the fury it can and in fact does provoke, and even the pathos of his final powerlessness"(qtd. in MacDonald and Cousins 278, 394). By rendering Jagger's "double self" as a part of the film's effort to make sense of the events of Altamont, *Gimme Shelter* offers a historically-specific representation of rock masculinity in the late 1960s and the relation of its gendered performances to the values and ideals of the youth movement. Utilizing a self-reflexive structure somewhat at odds with the precepts of direct cinema, the film on the one hand records—even appears fascinated by-- Jagger's efforts to transform white masculinity, to liberate it from the constraints of "straight" culture, to make it speak to and about the counterculture in terms set by rock music. But it also offers a critical account of how Jagger endeavors to maintain power over the terms of his own representation in a range of media, a will to power that imbricates this transformational performance of gender in the social and cultural workings of hegemonic masculinity. Considered with benefit of hindsight, the Stones as they appear in *Gimme Shelter* thus typify what Will Straw has observed to be "the contradictions of rock stardom: art vs. commerce, rebellion vs. conformity, artifice vs. authenticity" (83).

[3] In its account of rock masculinity, rock stardom, and countercultural youth, *Gimme Shelter* situates its audience both as fans and as critics: as participants in the heady, seductive experience of the Stones' music and likewise as critical viewers of the means by which rock stars, rock music, and rock masculinity are made, managed, and mediated. The film testifies to Jagger's complex gendered identity, refuting any sense of a monolithic white
masculinity as it offers a close look at a performance style that, as Sheila Whiteley has observed, "laid the foundations for self-invention and sexual plasticity which are now an integral part of contemporary youth culture" (67). We see in the film how Jagger expanded the representational vocabulary of contemporary masculinity--eroticizing it, broadening its scope in stage displays and vocal performances. We are also shown the ways that this gender performance is routed through various iterations of racial and class difference in an effort to transform middle-class, white masculinity in terms set by the beliefs and desires, the social and aesthetic priorities of the counterculture. Likewise, the film makes clear how this self-invention of the rock persona is mediated in various ways by the business of rock. In doing so, Gimme Shelter draws attention to the internal oppositions of this aestheticized, politicized and, in 1969, utterly new form of masculinity.

"Knowledge of the real world is exactly what we need"

The closer I adhere to reality the more honest and authentic my tales. . . . knowledge of the real world is exactly what we need to better understand and, possibly, to love one another. It's my way of making the world a better place. (Maysles 15).

[4] Gimme Shelter recounts the progress of the Stones' 1969 US tour from Northeast to South to West. Circling from New York's Madison Square Garden to California to Alabama and back again, the film traces a tightening spiral at whose center is the final—disastrous—free concert at Altamont Speedway, near San Francisco. Along the way, it recounts efforts to find a space for that concert, originally slated for Golden Gate Park; it records the role of San Francisco celebrity lawyer Melvin Belli, brought in when a subsequent deal with Sears Point Raceway broke down; and, during the concert itself, it observes the ongoing difficulties with crowd management and the rising tension between Hell's Angels, the organizers, performers, and audience, clashes that culminated in the death of Meredith Hunter, an 18 year old black man from Berkeley. In addition to cross-cutting between the East, West and South, the film cuts between past and present (or the more recent past), as it shows band-members and filmmakers reviewing footage of the tour. Its structure reflects editorial supervisor Charlotte Zwerin's sense of events during the Altamont concert, where as the day wore on "the light changed. . . and things got worse" (Gimme Shelter DVD commentary), in such a way that the entire tour appears pulled by its entropic movement. George M. Plasketes, comparing Gimme Shelter to other concert documentaries of the period--D.A. Pennebaker's Monterey Pop (1968) and Michael Wadleigh's Academy Award-winning Woodstock (1970)--criticizes it as "overly intricate," noting that that these events could have been more simply presented, in chronological order (64). But the documentary's film-within-a-film structure draws attention to the problematic nature of recollection for an event that quickly attained near-mythic status in accounts of the end of the 1960s, just as it draws attention to the problematic nature of the performances at its center. The film's structure encourages critical engagement though techniques of juxtaposition and counterpoint, emphasizing self-reflection on the part of those documented, and offering multiple sites of spectatorial engagement for the film's viewer.

[5] In these various disturbances of chronology, Gimme Shelter is atypical of direct cinema production, whose aim was "authentic
drama” (Vogels 1). Direct cinema, with its refusal of previous documentary convention and its aim to show rather than tell the viewer, was made possible by new lightweight equipment that streamlined the production process, its formal character reflecting the mobility and flexibility that these technologies afforded. Specifically, in its "complete abandonment of extratextual appeals to authority" as well as its "stipulation of transparency and non-control as a paradigm of authenticity" (Arthur 119, 124)---resulting in a commitment to what Thomas Waugh derides as a "gospel of inarticulacy" (235)---the direct cinema movement had a good deal in common with countercultural idealism of the period. In Albert Maysles' discussion of his documentary work with brother David, one hears, in fact, echoes of New Left and countercultural rhetoric, values and beliefs that find their complement in rock cultural investments in the authentic (Baker): "We live in an era where fake has taken over. It's time we turn it around and live in an era of authenticity and facing the facts. That's where our humanity lies. The documentary should be where you learn what it is to be human” (qtd. in Vogels 6). But, at the same time that the Maysles commit themselves to an ideal of authenticity as it is imagined by the direct cinema movement, Gimme Shelter confirms that, when it comes to technique, the filmmakers used, as Albert Maysles asserts, "whatever works!” (qtd. in Vogels 9).

[6] Thomas Waugh, in his critique of direct cinema, notes its "fetishization of the image" (242), the logical extension of its "almost transcendent faith in equipment" (Arthur 118). Gimme Shelter bears witness to direct cinema's articles of faith via the absence of techniques like interview or voiceover, and offers opportunities for fetishistic engagement with images of rock stars. But it also persistently queries and encourages the viewer to question the relation between seeing and knowing, in ways that directly impact the film's representations of gender. Particularly in the way that the film uses editorial equipment to de-mystify, or distance viewers from, events and performances, the way it moves between spaces of the tour and of the editing process, it disrupts those opportunities it offers for fetishistic engagement and encourages the viewer to reflect critically on the relation between screen and stars, stars and audience, pleasure and representation.

[7] Filmed as they review documentary footage on the Steenbeck monitor and listen to their sessions recorded at Muscle Shoals Studio in Alabama, the Rolling Stones are situated as both self-conscious performers and rapt spectators and auditors. In particular, both Mick Jagger and Charlie Watts are shown in these sequences as both participants in and witnesses to American rock and youth culture, with flat-bed mechanisms positioned as the means of recollection, self-reflection, appreciation and analysis. Their attention is focused in the first instance on their own images and performances, scenes of which point to the importance of image-making for the Rolling Stones. But music-making and image-making are of course not the only concern in Gimme Shelter. In key scenes, their attention is directed instead to the killing of Meredith Hunter, an event that is used to structure the film---and that places the film's representations of youth and rock cultures in a broader context of late 1960s social and political struggles.

[8] Events surrounding Hunter's death are discussed at the beginning of the film: Watts and Jagger respond to an audio track of radio coverage of the concert, including interviews with its British organizer Sam Cutler and Hell's Angel Sonny Barger. Towards the
end of *Gimme Shelter*, we are shown the incident: the Stones' performance of "Under My Thumb" breaks down, the film halts abruptly and we hear Mick Jagger, "Roll back on that David." The 16mm image reverses and isolates the moment that Hunter is stabbed by a white Hell's Angel—one of those purportedly hired for $500 dollars-worth of beer to keep the stage clear during the concert. Rolling back further, David Maysles notes the outline of a gun in Hunter's hand ("you can see it against the girl's crochet dress"). *Gimme Shelter* presents this moment both as the climax of the film and—more dramatically—the failure of the utopian ideal of "Woodstock Nation." In the way that it depicts the dramatic destruction of hippie idealism celebrated in the earlier concert and its documentary by Wadleigh, *Gimme Shelter* performs its own myth-making function. It places what was designed as little more than a publicity stunt for the Stones—a response to criticism of the high ticket prices commanded by their U.S. concert appearances that year—into a narrative of the counterculture's rise and fall, a narrative that has been repeated, with variations, in other accounts of the period (Chalmers, Curtis, Hotchner).

[9] Issues of blame and responsibility for Meredith Hunter's death have, understandably, shaped a good deal of the response both to the concert and the Maysles' and Zwerin's representation of it. The concert's tragic conclusion may well have been simply the result of last-minute organization plus ignorance on the part of the Rolling Stones' management, who approved the plan for Hell's Angels to protect the hastily constructed and easily accessible stage. This misjudgment was in part a product of the Stones' prior experience with the more benign British chapter of the Hell's Angels, hired as security for the band's Hyde Park appearance earlier in the year. As one Stones biographer notes, the nervous, clean-faced British Angels on display in Leslie Woodhead's 1969 documentary, *The Stones in the Park*, "bore as much similarity to their Californian cousins as tapioca does to paraquat" (Norman 297). With aural and visual accounts of the stabbing positioned at the beginning and end of *Gimme Shelter*, the viewer is never allowed complete immersion in the concert experience. Rather, the audience is encouraged to look for clues of impending violence and unraveling order in the film's record of events leading up to Altamont and its tragic conclusion, "tingeging the narrative with a sense of impending horror" (Plasketes 63).

[10] But despite the structural role of Hunter's death in the film and its use of Steenbeck technology to isolate the precise moment of violence, there is little sense of its revelation offering closure, for all that David Maysles later characterizes *Gimme Shelter* as a "mystery story" or a "detective story, sort of" (qtd. Lewis 1). Even though the image found in their footage contributed to the identification of Hunter's killer, uncertainties remain, prompted by the self-reflexive form of the film in which, as Dave Saunders notes, "the editing suite becomes a conscientious hall of mirrors" (127). So, what do these mirrors reflect? Using the Stones' engagement with the documentary production as touchstone and metaphor, *Gimme Shelter* persistently focuses on broader issues of rock and youth cultures. At the center is its representation of rock masculinity—the homosocial bonds of the Rolling Stones as they travel, work, and play (Bannister), and especially the dramatic performances on and off stage by band front-man Jagger. In the course of the film, the relation of Mick Jagger's star persona to rock musical and representational discourses of authenticity—the notion of "authenticity" being then as now a crucial element in the values and beliefs that animate the
gender politics of rock—proves to be as complex as that of the film itself.

"We have no problems": Utopian Aspirations, Theatrical Transformations

What was most obvious at the time (1967,1968) was that rock was "progressive" politically. Rock arguments focused on the problem of commercial cooptation, on the transformation of culture into commodity ("selling out"). Rock's artistic claims were inextricable from its political claims (hence its central role in the counterculture). This was a brief moment (from Woodstock to Altamont?) (Frith 60-61).

The very fact that we can speak of a woman "using" her sex or "using" her body for particular gains is highly significant—it is not that man cannot use his body in this way but that he doesn't have to (Doane 26).

[11] As the filmmakers' statement to Pauline Kael indicates, Jagger's "double self" literally takes center stage in Gimme Shelter. On the one hand, Jagger embodies the freedom, expressivity and hedonism of the countercultural movement, while on the other he appears adept in his relation to "straight" society, its media as well as the various technologies of music and cinema. The film shows how, without explicit political statements being made, the star status of Jagger and the Stones nevertheless positions them as a lightning rod for countercultural aspirations as they were consolidated in the period--and expressed in rock music and musical performance.

[12] The countercultural impulses of the hippie movement were separate from the specific political concerns of the New Left for most of the 1960s. But the end of the decade-- marked by the Tet Offensive, the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert F. Kennedy and by violent clashes during the Democratic National Convention in Chicago--saw the drawing together of American youth cultural and political movements. The hippie movement had been deliberately anti-political for much of the 1960s as part of its refusal of the mainstream (Michaels 50); but, on November 1st 1968 "White Panther" John Sinclair, in the underground newspaper The Fifth Estate, highlighted the political significance of the counterculture, articulating its underlying values as a "program" for change and asserting the hippie way of life was in fact a "cultural revolution":

. . . . our art, the music, newspapers, books, posters, our clothing, our homes, the way we walk and talk, the way our hair grows, the way we smoke dope and fuck and eat and sleep—it is all one message, and the message is FREEDOM! . . . As Brother Elderidge Cleaver says . . . there's only two kinds of people on the planet: those who make up the problem and those who are the solution. WE ARE THE SOLUTION. We have no "problems." Everything must be free for everybody. Money is obsolete. The white honkie culture that has been handed to us on a silver plastic platter is meaningless to us! We don't want it! . . . . rock & roll music is the spearhead of our attack because it's so effective and so much fun. . . . (89-91).

Sinclair's comments on the political significance of countercultural life
and style choices notwithstanding, the Woodstock Music and Art Fair of August 1969—model and inspiration for the Rolling Stones' concert in December—was largely apolitical. When Yippie organizer Abbie Hoffman—who described the movement as "a cross-fertilization of the hippie and New Left philosophies" (102)—attempted to rally support during Woodstock for John Sinclair who, like himself, was arrested during the Democratic National Convention, he was urged off the stage by an impatient, guitar-wielding Pete Townshend (Evans and Kingsbury 165-69, Street 38).

[13] But even if rock performance took precedence over politics during the concert, the success of Woodstock—in its pervasive sense of community and peace, despite an unexpectedly huge crowd, too few toilets, and a storm that turned open ground into a sea of mud—served as evidence to many that the counterculture was "winning the struggle for the nation's soul" (Lytle 335). In the process, it raised expectations of future events as well as the possible future political significance of what Hoffman and others dubbed "Woodstock Nation." This expectation became part of the rhetoric leading up to the Rolling Stones' concert in San Francisco: it too would showcase a nation within a nation. Thus when, in Gimme Shelter, the Rolling Stones announce their intention to the U.S. press, Mick Jagger makes a point of highlighting the concert's broader significance: "It's creating a sort of microcosmic society, which sets an example to the rest of America, as to how one can behave in large gatherings." Such high expectations of what the concert would say about the counterculture and its political viability give the tragic conclusion of Gimme Shelter greater resonance, as stage-side violence was taken as a sign of countercultural failure to achieve social and political transformation in a country torn by racial strife. Placed in the context of both these expectations and disappointments, the significance of performances by the Stones, and especially Jagger, in the film are likewise heightened, appearing as a consolidation of the desires—and failures—of countercultural youth.

[14] At the end of the 1960s, a decade over the course of which the number of students enrolled in higher degree programs more than doubled (Isserman and Kazin 16), university-age youth, grouped together either on campuses or in low cost rental housing, acquired by sheer numbers a visibility boosted by the counterculture's commitment to the dramatization of its difference. Charles Reich, in his 1970 best-seller The Greening of America, identifies the counterculture as being comprised in the first instance of the "bright, sensitive children of the affluent middle class. . . . who had been exposed to the very best of liberal arts education" (189). While Reich emphasizes in his paean to the hippie movement its difference from previous generations, Leonard Wolf, in the introduction to his 1968 oral history of Haight-Ashbury youth of San Francisco, identifies the counterculture as "second-generation beats" or more lyrically, as "beats—with wings" (xx). Similarities between the two groups are evident in Todd Gitlin's description of the beats as an "oppositional space" within the "affluent consensus" of the 1950s, a description that could easily be applied to the 1960s counterculture as well: "hostile to the postwar bargain of workaday routine in exchange for material acquisition, they devoted themselves to principled poverty, indulged their taste for sexual libertinism, and looked eastward for enlightenment" (28). But Wolf also notes the generational differences between these two groups: while the beat generation was "dark, silent, moody, lonely, sad—and its music was jazz," the hippie by contrast was "bright, vivacious, ecstatic, crowd-loving, joyful—and its
music [was] rock" (xxi).

[15] Countercultural youth were—quite literally—self-fashioning, and their commitment to breaking down conventions, especially conventions of public behavior and personal appearance, was richly documented by the rockumentary genre. For all its address to a youth audience, the rockumentary also has elements of the voyeuristic, a commitment to highlighting the spectacular and noteworthy in terms that recall coverage of the hippie movement in the popular press. These voyeuristic tendencies found their complement in the counterculture's own tendency toward exhibitionism, an outgrowth of its determination to break down barriers between the public and private. In *Gimme Shelter*, we see both tendencies at work in the way that its particular fascination with hippie life and style hosts a growing sense of unease with bodies and behaviors out of control. Countercultural exhibitionism manifested itself in a range of behaviors available for sensational treatment on film, but was most clearly consolidated in hippie anti-fashion, notable for its determination to draw the eye and eroticize the body in new ways, while expressing a utopian nostalgia for the preindustrial and agrarian.

[16] Reich underplays its theatrical elements when he compares hippie attire with "architecture that does not clash with its natural surroundings but blends in" and asserts that clothes worn any time, to do anything, "express freedom" and a "wholeness of the self" (198). Youth found both freedom and group identity especially in denim jeans: while they may appear to have been the unofficial uniform of the counterculture, Reich asserts that despite their ubiquity, because they "are extremely expressive of the human body," they also point to an appreciation that "each body is different and unique" (199). But hippie attire had other significance as well. Like denim—which previous decades associated with hard labor and rural poverty—materials such as homespun, suede, fur, satins and velvet, evident in costumes both on and off stage in *Gimme Shelter*, theatrically announced countercultural identification with other races, ethnicities, and time periods. In the magpie eclecticism of countercultural fashion, Reich sees evidence of both the populism and playfulness of the movement, as well as its commitment to fantasies of otherness: while the basis of a hippie's attire is the inexpensive or mass-produced or discarded products of technologized culture, "he can add touches. . . that make them a costume, expressing whatever he feels at the moment. . . a head band can produce an Indian, a black hat a cowboy bad man" (199-200).

[17] One of the visible results of this resistance to middle-class rules of gendered self-representation and the introjections of otherness to create a new, oppositional identity for youth was a stylistic tendency toward androgyny. Both young women and men wore jeans; and, as young men traded neckties for necklaces, they also embraced conventionally feminine adornments like long hair, bright colors, elaborate and decorative fabrics. Reich and Wolf agree in their accounts that the site of countercultural fashion's most spectacular physical transformations was the young male body. The different status of countercultural self-fashioning for women and men is affirmed by Wolf who observes that, in the search for employment, hippie "girls" were comparatively "easy to place," as they "were pretty" and their clothing was "easily modified into presentability," while males by contrast were limited in their options to positions where they "did not need to meet the straight world head-on"
The straight world's difficulty with hippie style for men confirms Mary Ann Doane's observations regarding the different status of male and female transvestitism, the former "an occasion for laughter" the latter "only another occasion for desire" (25). But while male hippies suffered ridicule for daring to make spectacles of themselves, others saw in them a new eroticization of the male body: as Wolf herself recalls, "the dress of the young men was indeed beautiful to see" (xlii). David Savran discusses the different gendered and generational responses to hippie masculinity in his analysis of the luncheonette scene in Easy Rider (1969), where Billy (Dennis Hopper), Wyatt "Captain America" (Peter Fonda), and George (Jack Nicholson) capture the attention of a rural Louisiana Sheriff and his deputies as well as some local young women, observing that the "dramatic tension in the scene is based in large part on the conflict between the hostility of the men and the desire of the women" (134).

In claiming "the right to adorn their bodies, the right to be beautiful" (Wolf xlii), young men of the counterculture endeavored to reverse the "The Great Masculine Renunciation" of the 18th century (Flugel 102-08), the historical point at which Europe's emergent middle class brought attendant changes in relations between class and gender. As Kaja Silverman points out, this was the point at which "[s]umptuousness" in attire and its expression of "narcissistic and exhibitionist desires" ceased to be a marker of privileged nobility and became instead a marker of gender difference (Fragments 141); when men put aside their finery, "men and women were placed on opposite sides of the great visual divide," on the male side of which was subsequently "all sobriety and rectitude," with little variation in its attire, remaining "largely unchanged for two centuries" (Fragments 147). These characteristics, she observes, effectively construct masculinity as "stable and constant and so align it with the symbolic order" (Fragments 147). Hippie self-fashioning, in Reich's and Wolf's accounts, was a refusal of convention—of the symbolic order—for the purposes of expressing, releasing, dis-inhibiting the individual. But, as both Reich and Wolf also make clear, this theatrical refusal of the symbolic trappings of male authority did not extend itself to a more general refusal of gendered inequality; for instance, the essential domesticity of women, even countercultural women, remained, consolidated in the image of young men attired in "[t]ie-dyed shirts lovingly sewn by the girls" (xlii). In a similar fashion, in Gimme Shelter we see the way that theatrical transformations of countercultural masculinity function alongside more traditional inequities of power along the lines of gender, race, and class, borne out especially in what appear as the multiple personae of Mick Jagger and the way he performs rock masculinity in both the "straight" and countercultural worlds of the film, performances that communicate in different ways his control over the terms of his own representation.

Gimme Shelter—with its sequences of Melvin Belli's theatrical dickering in his cavernous, highly-decorated office—reminds the viewer of rock's commercial and industrial side and the relation of these to the counterculture, even when attempting a purportedly non-commercial celebration. In doing so it depicts the dual place of rock music, in both the youth counterculture and the mainstream, reminding the viewer of the fact that, Rock may wear subcultural clothes, identify with marginalised minorities, promote countercultural political positions, and upset genteel notions of
propriety, but from its inception it has been a large-scale, industrially organised, mass-mediated, mainstream phenomenon operating at the very centre of society (Keightly 127).

_Gimme Shelter_, at the same time it bears witness to the utopian aspirations underpinning the concert at Altamont, also shows how rock takes its place in "the very centre of society" in sequences that present the legal and logistical considerations involved in setting up the free concert and its coverage by various media. Representation of mainstream interests function as both background and foil to the film's portrait of the counterculture, depictions of power and authority that ultimately highlight the fragility of youth's oppositional fantasies, its reliance upon and vulnerability to the "establishment." Most vividly, the dueling white masculinities of property owners, lawyers, and businessmen are set in contrast to those masculinities endeavoring to operate outside the mainstream: the reluctant authoritarianism of the concert's young white male organizers, the confrontational "one-percenter" masculinity of the Hell's Angels ("the one percent that don't fit and don't care" [qtd. Thompson 14]), and the various other masculinities that perform both on and off-stage during the concert. In this context, Mick Jagger shows himself to be adept across an entire spectrum of gendered and racialized and class-based performances.

[20] The film shows Jagger to be an embodiment of countercultural fantasies of liberal pluralism and exotic otherness on the one hand, and an astute businessman and media spokesman on the other, only losing his self-confident control of people and events in the final moments of violence. Thus Hunter's death resonates not only with the representation of the counterculture more generally, especially the mostly-white youth audience's theatrical identification with otherness, but is depicted as a challenge specifically to the sort of transformational white masculinity the counterculture puts—quite literally—at center stage. This is highlighted by the final image of Jagger in _Gimme Shelter_; in the editing suite, just having revisited on the Steenbeck the final moments of Altamont, he is caught in a freeze-frame, blank-faced and overexposed, no longer the figure of fluid self-fashioning or the adept manipulator of image.

[21] This image of Jagger was originally the final one of the film; the ending was changed to that of the Altamont audience leaving with "Gimme Shelter" on the soundtrack in response to Jagger's objections (Chaiken, Kasher and Maysles 236-37). The dramatic, metaphorically-loaded effect of this frozen image of Jagger is heightened by the fact that, from the beginning, _Gimme Shelter_ focuses on Jagger's active role as image-maker, his control over various types of media and representation. In the pre-title sequence over a black screen we hear Sam Cutler announce, "for the first time in three years, the greatest rock and roll band in the world, the Rolling Stones!" Sounds of cheering crowds greet the image—not of Jagger, or the band on stage, as one might expect, but of Charlie Watts on a donkey. Sequences from a photo shoot on an English highway, in which Stones drummer Watts performs for a photographer under Jagger's direction, are juxtaposed with a portion of the soundtrack from the Madison Square Garden concert. Instruments are being tuned and the tap of drumsticks mimics camera clicks as Watts poses. Watts is a striking choice for the shoot, being the least flamboyant of the group, the least likely to play to or even acknowledge the audience during concert appearances, as he keeps—quite literally—to the background of the stage, face...
shuttered as he measures out the beat that drives the Stones. As he poses here with a donkey and a self-conscious smile in bits of fancy dress (the Uncle Sam top hat and one of the dramatic scarves worn by Jagger throughout the U.S. tour, a knight's helmet, an antique gun) the effect is to highlight, at the very beginning of the film, the way in which rock culture moves masculinity into the spotlight, as a spectacle is made out of the Stones' most reluctant showman. Moreover, the comic assemblage of references to a European past and American present in Watts' costume recalls Yippie theatrics, such as Jerry Rubin attending the House Committee on Un-American Activities investigations dressed as a Revolutionary War soldier, after he and Abbie Hoffman were subpoenaed in 1967.

As Watts' performance and Jagger's direction of the shoot are captured on film, we hear Jagger speaking to the Madison Square Garden audience, engaged in making a spectacle of yet another unlikely subject. He attempts to turn the tables on the concert audience, saying "New York you talk a lot. . . . Let's take a look atcha. . . . We're gonna see how beautiful you are. . . ." Jagger's effort to redirect the look of the concert signals what Jonathan B. Vogels observes to be the film's modernist concern with conditions of "seeing and understanding reality" (76); but, this moment of offering a reverse angle on the youth audience also has a more specific thematic role to play in a film that focuses persistently on the theatrical aspects of the 1960s counterculture and rock culture, both on and off stage, as it links the theatricality of rock masculinity to the theatricality of the youth counterculture as a whole.

**Camping with the Counterculture: Gender, Performance, Masquerade**

I think the concert is an excuse. . . . the proscenium of a theatre. It's like an excuse for everyone to just get together, talk to each other. . . ball each other. . . have a nice day out (Jagger *Gimme Shelter*).

In an Anglo Saxon world, where only women flaunted their sexuality, effeminacy was the best course open to a male sex symbol—even the frumpish Bill Haley sported a kiss curl (Booth 155).

[23] The Stones are performers, but so too are the youth in their audience, a point that Jagger himself makes during his interview with journalists prior to taking the stage at Altamont, when he describes the concert as "proscenium" and draws attention to the way that the entire festival space is a theatrical one. The hippie aesthetic—with its earnest rejection of the artificial and synthetic and its embrace of the natural, and in its utopian commitment to stripping away mainstream convention—seems remote from those ironic poses and performances most commonly associated with camp. But Andrew Ross makes a case for hippie flea market style being likewise based in a camp aesthetic. Like those gay subcultures that revive Hollywood glamour of the past, so too, he says, is the hippie aesthetic "a re-creation of surplus value from forgotten forms of labor" (151). Considered alongside Mark Booth's assessment of camp as being a kind of "self-parody" that "presents the self as being willfully irresponsible and immature" and whose "artificial nature" makes it "a sort of off-stage theatricality" (18)—all of which is grounded in a "sense of exclusion"(90)—it is evident that the counterculture was a space where camp aesthetics could thrive. In its most innocent moments of high-mindedness, the counterculture
produced its share of kitsch; but its self-conscious theatrics—such as the various Yippie media pranks that blend self-mockery with the subversion of mainstream values—were solidly camp performances. In its masquerade of the exotic and marginalized, its utopian fantasies of pastness and otherness, as well as its campily self-conscious mockery of values and expectations of the straight world, the counterculture found its complement in the music and image of the Rolling Stones.

[24] In the opening sequence of *Gimme Shelter* we see Jagger move from his initial dual role as director of the photo shoot on the image track and "agent provocateur" of the youth audience on the soundtrack (Vogels 18), to a performance of "Jumpin' Jack Flash" at Madison Square Garden that combines elements of both roles in its knowing manipulation of image and its deft channeling of youthful energy and desire. The song, as lyrically sparse and vividly imagistic as the blues from which the Stones' music is derived, demonstrates how effective the songwriting team Mick Jagger and Keith Richards was in wedding contemporary concerns of the youth counterculture to a blues-based music grounded in the past. A teacup-sized bildungsroman with Jagger at its center, lyrically the song has elements of both the autobiographical form and the "near-tragic, near-comic lyricism" Ralph Ellison has observed in the blues (78). A cartoonishly vivid rendition of the working class identity embraced by the Stones, it narratively propels performer and audience from past to present, subjugation to freedom, suffering to ecstasy and—even, perhaps especially, for the audiences of this 1969 tour—from Britain to America, as it turns on how a Dickensian boyhood (dark and stormy, marked by abuse at the hands of an aged and grotesque maternal figure) is subsequently transformed into triumphant young masculinity: "Jumpin' Jack Flash." Repeating that quintessential statement of sixties optimism, "It's alright," it is a celebration of the modern, of the now, based in a somewhat-tongue-in-cheek dramatic recreation of the past.

[25] But even more important than the lyrical invocation of the new is the way the music frames Jagger's own performance of self-transformation. In contrast to his more static (if still charismatic) stage presence in television appearances of the mid-1960s, Jagger ranges over the entire stage in a practiced but apparently spontaneous set of moves that punctuate his song and incorporate responses to both band members and audience. And, just as hippie males draw inspiration from conventional tropes of femininity (long hair, beads) to "be beautiful," Jagger's dance moves and facial expressions are drawn from stereotypically feminine erotic display: hip and lip thrusts in time with the music, twitches of an overlong pink satin scarf, flirtatious smiles and dramatic hair flips share the stage with handclaps and fist punches into the air. Reputedly, he based his dance moves on his study of "bold soul sister" Tina Turner and the Ikettes (Hotchner 156-7)—and certainly there are similarities between this performance and the mixture of tough female attitude and Pentecostal exuberance that one sees in many of Turner's stage performances of the 1960s (Mosher). As Variety commented on *Gimme Shelter*, "it captures that petulant omnisexuality that made many adults consider Jagger a threat to their daughters, sons and household pets alike." There are also signs as to just how ironic, how self-conscious this display is: the knowing smiles and eye rolls that punctuate the song indicate Jagger's distance from and control over his display, an example of what Booth describes as the "shameless insincerity of camp" (19). Likewise, these signals of Jagger's persistent self-consciousness in
regard to the spectacle he makes of himself effectively confirm Thomas Hess’s observation that camp “exists in the smirk of the beholder” (qtd. Ross 145).

[26] This performance of rock masculinity pursues the camp aesthetic developed earlier by the Stones, an example of which is the cover art for their 1966 U.K. single “Have You Seen Your Mother, Baby, Standing in the Shadows” in which the entire band appears in drag. Jagger’s performance is cobbled from tropes of feminine display, working class rebellion, all energetically and imaginatively combined with the R&B-influenced rock. Jagger’s theatricalization and eroticization of his body appear in Gimme Shelter as a staging of white masculinity deliberately responsive to the liberatory fantasies and desires of countercultural youth. And, it is a performance of rock masculinity that remakes fandom as well. Phil May, lead singer of U.K. band Pretty Things recalls, “Prior to the advent of the Stones and the R&B music they played, audiences were very much segregated. . . . However, the Stones turned that around: . . . the audience became much more integrated. Then it was the boys fighting their way to the front as much as the chicks. . . .

The Stones ignited that and Jagger in particular” (Hotchner 114-15). And, whereas earlier screen representations of rock performances (such as the Beatles’ A Hard Day’s Night of 1964) maintained a gendered division between performer and fan—effectively feminizing fandom as it appeared on screen—Gimme Shelter emphasizes the cross-gender appeal of the Stones and its vocalist. The film highlights this in a vignette of Jagger’s interaction with his fans. Between the lines of the second verse of “Jumpin’ Jack Flash,” Jagger bends almost as if to kiss the audience, lips pursed in a half smile. A reverse angle captures an entranced female fan looking up and mirroring his expression, her own lips similarly posed. Then a pan to the right shows an equally entranced pair of male fans looking up at Jagger, mouth and eyes open wide in something like ecstasy as their fists hit the air and their heads flail in time to the music. Thus, at the same time Jagger’s performance acknowledges its own campiness and artifice, it also is shown to provide a genuine erotic appeal to the audience in his function as go-between, performing and facilitating visceral engagement with the dance rhythms and the fat, blues-inspired sound of Richard's open-tuned guitar. In these terms, Jagger offers himself as an object both of desire and identification to both male and female fans, in the new image of erotically-charged young masculinity.

[27] Gimme Shelter’s film-within-a-film structure allows for Jagger’s vivid stage performances to be directly juxtaposed with his role as the solemn, intent young man at the Steenbeck, the “philosopher behind a movieola” as David Maysles termed it in a letter to Jagger (Chaiken, Kasher and Maysles 236). His stage persona is also contrasted to that of other performers in the film, one of the most striking examples of which is Tina Turner’s rendition, with husband Ike, of the Otis Redding song, “I’ve Been Loving You Too Long.” Her performance is quite different from those that appear to have influenced Jagger’s own stage repertoire—the emphatic stomp, strut, shout, shimmy and head shake of, for example, her mid 1960s interpretations of Ike Turner’s “Fool in Love.” In her performance of “Fool in Love,” the sheer energy and exhilaration of the song and the power of the singer (in a voice that sounds, as rock journalist Christian Wright puts it, “like freedom” [169]) are in contrast to the pain and shame the lyrics tell us she suffers at the hands of her lover, her “good” man who treats her so badly. In the sequence that Jagger watches at the monitor, she is performing with Ike a dramatic
addendum to Redding's song that realigns its emotional focus to the man-who-treats-me-bad-but-makes-me-feel-so-good thematic of "Fool in Love." But in contrast to the earlier song's vocal (if not lyrical) assertion of empowered femininity, in this performance Tina Turner enacts her complete submission in a call and response exchange between herself and Ike. Different from the call and response pattern of assertion and answer that creates a sense of community between singer and chorus, this exchange subsumes one voice to the other, Ike not so much speaking to Tina, as for her. This effect is heightened by the framing of the film that renders Ike (located behind her on the darkened stage, playing guitar) as a disembodied voice for much of the performance. His off-screen voice tells Tina what to sing and she lyrically submits to him, proclaiming her willingness to do anything, buy anything he wants, so long as he stays and loves her.

Tina Turner's replies—in contrast to the cool authority of Ike's "call"—are marked by increasing emotional and physical agitation, as she performs a body pulled out of control by desire. As she moves toward a sexual/musical climax, she caresses the microphone with gestures that stop just short of a sort of technological fellatio. In doing so, she performs and eroticizes what appears to be at that moment an entirely disempowered femininity, multiply framed and contained by masculinity—including the technologies of entertainment. Despite the fact that it is "her" song, Tina Turner appears—through the structure and lyrics of the duet and as a result of her sexualized performance—more as its object than subject, framed by the authoritative/empowered male voice that directs/inspires her erotic display. Her performance highlights what Mary Ann Doane terms the "overpresence" of the female body (22), described by Luce Irigaray as a "closeness with the other that is so near that she cannot possess it any more than she can possess herself" (qtd. Doane 22). Enacted by one of the first women in rock, by a black woman with a precarious existence in a white-male-dominated industry, it is a performance of excess that recalls Joan Riviere's 1929 discussion of the intellectual woman with a position of responsibility in a male-dominated profession, who compensated for her "theft" of masculinity by donning "womanliness...assumed and worn as a mask" (306). Riviere asserts that she did so "both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals if she was found to possess it—much as a thief will turn out his pockets and ask to be searched to prove that he has not the stolen goods" (306). The "mask" that Tina Turner assumes in this performance is of a stereotypically feminine closeness to the body—"so close, so excessive" that it "prevents the woman from assuming a position similar to a man's in relation to signifying systems" (Doane 23). She is greeted with cheers from the audience off-screen when, after its conclusion, she acknowledges her performance of a "hyperbolization" of femininity (Doane 26), with a nod, smile, and wave to concertgoers.

At that moment of acknowledging her audience—and her masquerade—we see how Tina Turner's performance of a lack of distance, a lack of control over the body (or what Doane calls "a lack of a lack") in fact allows some measure of power in its "simulation of the missing gap or distance" between herself and her image (Doane 26). But this simulation of a gap is offset by the way her "flaunting" of femininity is presented in Gimme Shelter. Tina Turner's performance is doubly framed by male authority—more specifically, by audiovisual technologies gendered as male. Kaja Silverman, in her discussion of sexual difference and the voice, has
observed how the disembodied male voice can take an authoritative role similar to "the gaze" in the way that it is aligned with the cinematic apparatus (Acoustic 48-54). Tina Turner's performance is framed in just such a fashion, directed by Ike's voice. Moreover, Ike Turner is associated with the sound technologies that enable Tina's performance, via the unsubtle sexual metaphor of the microphone; in this, we see popular music's erotic investments in the black male body transformed into a signifier of his sexual/technological power and control. And, of course, the Turners' performance is likewise framed by Jagger's very conventional positioning as male spectator at the editing suite, a voyeur aligned with the power of the camera and the gaze.

[30] At the same time, Jagger's positioning at the monitor also prompts comparisons between his performances of femininity and Tina Turner's. Both present themselves in their roles as vocalists as potential objects of desire and identification to the audience; both enable emotional responses to and engagement with music. But, while one is a performance of proximity to the body, a lack of a lack, the other is a performance of distance, reliant upon conventions of camp irony. Thus, even though we see Jagger watching Tina Turner perform in the same way that he watches himself on the monitor in other sequences, what the film presents at this moment appears less an identificatory relation between two singers who both employ feminine masquerade as part of their eroticization of musical performance, than a far more conventional representation of masculinity, in which Ike Turner and Mick Jagger are both identified in their respective power over and separation from Tina's spectacle. That being said, Jagger's repetition of Tina's phrase "sock it" as he watches her (which a number of my students in the past have heard as "suck it") is ambiguous. Is he reveling in her performance? Carried away by desire? Or just practicing? Ultimately, however, Jagger asserts his place outside her performance with a comment that denies any identification while doubling as clumsy innuendo: "It's nice to have a chick occasionally."

[31] Andrew Ross points out how, in "donning gypsy and denim," countercultural youth "were also patronizing the current aspirations of those social groups for whom such clothes called up a long history of poverty, social exclusion, and oppression. . . . invoking historical signifiers already saturated with the unequal opportunities accorded to class, race, sex, and nationhood" (151-2). However playful they appeared, the performative elements of hippie style were based in and were an exercise of cultural power, made possible by the white middle-class privilege they rejected. Gimme Shelter, owing to its film-within-a-film structure, depicts Jagger's performances as being likewise such exercises of power, by highlighting the authoritative roles Jagger takes in relation to various media: from his initial role as "director" in the pre-credit sequence, to that of spokesperson for the band and their audience, to his positioning at the movieola outside the spectacle that Tina Turner makes of herself on stage. And, in his own stage role of "stylized effeminacy" (Booth 18), his self-parody confirms distance between—and his control over—himself and his image. In the masterful stage performances documented by Gimme Shelter, Jagger invokes tropes of black femininity, whose eroticization-- as the Turners' interpretation of "I've Been Loving You Too Long" reminds the viewer--is inseparable from sexual and racial inequalities of the moment.

Race and Regionalism, Blues and Blackness: the Stones at Muscle Shoals
To wear or even enjoy blackface was literally, for a time, to become black, to inherit the cool, virility, humility, abandon, or gaîté de coeur that were the prime components of white ideologies of black manhood (Lott 52).

. . . unlike all the other R and B groups worthy of the name, the Rolling Stones have a definite visual appeal. . . . They are genuine R and B fanatics themselves and they sing and play in a way that one would have expected more from a coloured U.S. group than a bunch of wild, exciting white boys who have the fans screaming and listening to them.

Record Mirror April 1963 (qtd. Hotchner 95).

[32] The scene in which Jagger watches the Turners' performance, in addition to highlighting the different stake that he and Tina Turner have in masquerades of femininity, is also a scene that recalls the Stones' complex relation with blackness—or to use Eric Lott's more precise phrase, with "white ideologies of black manhood" (52). While Gimme Shelter shows how Jagger—like countercultural masculinity more generally—pursues a new eroticization of the male body through tropes of feminine display, it also shows how ideas of blackness feature in the construction of Jagger's star persona and underpin the authenticity of the Stones' music more generally. On one hand, the black, southern culture the Rolling Stones engages with is—as evinced by the lyrical focus on randy English slavers and sexy slaves in "Brown Sugar" —a creation as orientalist and theatrical as hippie attire. On the other, similar to those pre-lapsarian fantasies of the counterculture that inspired a pursuit of authenticity through masquerade, the Stones' musical investment in the blues—evident in a range of creative and performative engagements—was linked to the ideologies of the authentic that motivated musical connoisseurship and cultural nostalgia in the blues revivals of the 1950s and 1960s.

[33] As the self-proclaimed "bad boys" of rock, early in their career the Rolling Stones staked out musical terrain "based in the blues. . . down and dirty. . . replete with exaggerated aggressiveness and overt sexuality" (Garafalo 173). Their carefully cultivated working class identity was filtered through their fascination with black American culture, in both its connotations of otherness and authenticity. Thus, a theatrical deployment of black masculinity became a key element in the development of Jagger's stage persona in particular. For instance, in the Stones' May 1965 performance on Shindig!, an American musical variety show on ABC TV, we see both the band's straightforward acknowledgement of the blues as an inspiration for their own music and likewise their use of the blues to create a new image of dangerous, sexualized white masculinity—especially for Jagger. In contrast to their performances of original compositions "The Last Time" and "Satisfaction" in the same episode, the performance and mise en scene of "Little Red Rooster" conjures fantastic images of blackness.

[34] The staging of "Little Red Rooster" features a gothic setting of painted stone doorway and hanging boughs, through which the camera moves to find Jagger standing alone in the shadows. Slide guitar is barely audible over sound effects of wind whistling through trees. The gothic theme continues in the lighting, as Jagger remains isolated on a darkened stage through the entire song—the band is hidden in shadows, only evident in profile later in the sequence.
Jagger's backdrop is abstract shadows that resemble a spider's web. His face is highlighted—and shadowed—by flickering illumination suggestive of moon or fire light. The Halloweenish sound effects (including a wolf howl when Jagger sings of dogs howling) are undeniably campy—as Jagger himself acknowledges with a twist of the lip and widening of the eyes in mock horror. But, despite these gestures of self-consciousness that anticipate his more deliberately camp performances later in the decade, this staging of the blues confirms the degree to which Jagger's developing image depended upon a dramatic reimagining of black masculinity as something sinister but intriguing. The Willie Dixon song "Little Red Rooster" is, lyrically speaking, an almost-comic tongue-in-cheek sexual complaint; it features a rooster who is too lazy to get up in the morning and who is consequently a disappointment to the barnyard. But the Rolling Stones' version transforms the animal-sexual imagery into something more menacing.

[35] John Szwed sees such performances as evidence of the way black culture has been assimilated by a dominant white culture: "The fact that, say, a Mick Jagger can today perform the same tradition [of whites emulating blacks] without blackface simply marks the detachment of culture from race and almost the full absorption of a black tradition into white culture" (85). Yet, the effect of Jagger's performance relies precisely upon its efforts to highlight the otherness of the blackness with which he identifies, to construct it as something archaic and sinister. Moreover, the different status of performances of blackness, when enacted by white or black musicians, is confirmed by the contrast between performances of the blues by the Stones and Howlin' Wolf on the same Shindig! episode. Howlin' Wolf, acknowledged by Jagger and Brian Jones in the show as an important influence on their music—and whose own 1961 version of "Little Red Rooster" inspired the Stones' interpretation--performs "How Many More Years," a song he recorded for Chess in 1951. On a brightly lit stage he is surrounded by the Shin-diggers and the Wellingtons—the show's all-white dancers and backing singers—who (in an unusual gesture of restraint) remain seated and limit their engagement with the music to bright smiles, demure hand claps and head bobs: though they appear to enjoy the music, there is no dancing, no bodily movement. It is a staging of his performance that endeavors to minimize the erotic appeal of the blues, as markedly as the mise en scène of Jagger's performance attempts to heighten it. There are a number of possible reasons for the two songs to be so differently staged by Shindig! for its home audience—including the different ages and relative star power of Howlin' Wolf and Jagger in 1965. Nevertheless, these two performances, with the effort to minimize the erotic appeal of the blues in the one and to maximize it in the other, seem to bear out Krin Gabbard's observation that the "large audiences that applauded [Benny] Goodman and Jagger were like the audiences for minstrelsy—male and female—who preferred to consume their fantasies of black male sexuality only when they were mediated through the bodies of white performers" (45).

[36] Gabbard's observation resonates through the sequence in Gimme Shelter that recounts the Stones' journey down South, to the recording studio in Muscle Shoals, Alabama, where we see the various ways in which the film connects the Stones to constructions of blues authenticity. These scenes, while less fantastical than the gothic treatment of "Little Red Rooster" in the 1965 television broadcast, are no less representative of a white ideological stake in ideas of blackness. In the way that the Alabama sequence is
bracketed by blues covers of Mississippi Fred McDowell and Robert
Johnson, it confirms the connection between the blues, blackness
and the South. The sound-over for the Stones' arrival at the Muscle
Shoals Holiday Inn is their cover of McDowell's "You Gotta Move,"
which includes Richard's faithful replication of McDowell's acoustic
slide guitar style and Jagger's note for note vocal imitation; it
concludes with their performance of Johnson's "Love in Vain." In
between we hear bits and pieces of southern-inflected and southern-
inspired original compositions, "Wild Horses" and "Brown Sugar."
Their cover of "You Gotta Move" retains the pared-down style
characteristic of McDowell, a Mississippi farmer whose music was
first recorded in the late 1950s by ethno-musicologist Alan Lomax. A
simple slide riff repeated over a single chord gives the song a
monotony that blues singer "Bukka" White observed to be linked
specifically with rural life and agricultural work, commenting that,
"the blues come from behind a mule" (qtd. Bromell 200).

[37] The cover of McDowell's song accompanies images of band
members at the motel and point-of-view shots from the car as they
travel to the studio. These offer a brief visual summary of the
American South: highways, rural landscape, pickup trucks, a
roadside ad for farm insurance. Jagger's vocal mimicry on the
soundtrack is placed in contrast to his image: his costume for this
journey--white suit, red flat cap, red shirt and sunglasses--quotes
1960s black urban cool (and in fact appears the uncanny negative of
Meredith Hunter's green suit with black shirt and hat that we glimpse
in the Altamont stabbing sequence) while a dramatically long red
scarf and two-tone shoes add a dash of theatrical excess. Jagger's
self-conscious style notwithstanding, the images of the road
combined with McDowell's song link the Stones to the itinerant
bluesmen who became the image of black authenticity (in contrast
to, for instance, blues performed by women or what connoisseurs
labeled urban blues) during the blues revival of the late 1950s
(Hamilton 132-69). McDowell's song is delivered in a blues form that
evokes the repetition and stasis of rural life, but it lyrically celebrates
life on the road. Thus, it effectively speaks to images of both the
mobility and the monotony of the Rolling Stones' life on tour. In this
way, the Stones' "real" life (eg. their life away from the stage) is
linked directly to the "country blues," whose sound was heralded by
blues revivalists as "authentic": "an acoustic guitar in a mournful
strain, eerie, hypnotic, seemingly archaic" (Hamilton 149). Thus
Gimme Shelter offers an audiovisual representation of rock
masculinity that emphasizes the similarities between the Stones and
the sort of musicians Frederic Ramsay commemorated in his 1960
study of the blues, Been Here and Gone: those "self-made
outcasts...who prefer this life of impermanence...[who] found that
the road, which offered adventure, was better than their homes,
which offered nothing" (qtd. Hamilton 158).

[38] In Muscle Shoals studio, the Stones' performance of "You Gotta
Move" gives way to another piece of mimicry directed toward
southern, rural culture: prompted by a flier Keith Richards has saved
from "Minnie Pearl's Chicken Kitchen," Richards and Jagger try out
their southern accents ("How-dee-licious!"), momentarily placing their
own performances in the context of "Cousin Minnie Pearl," Grand
Ole Opry and Hee Haw comedienne Sarah Cannon's gently parodic,
camp performance of hillbilly culture. The comic aside links the
southern accent Jagger affects for many of his performances to his
flamboyantly effeminate stage routines, the vocal effect, like his
dance moves, put on like a costume. But the sequence also asserts
the way such mimicry can give voice to the authentic, blues-based
rock masculinity valorized in the beginning of this sequence. In the scene in which they review their performance of "Wild Horses" recorded at Muscle Shoals, its lyrical complaint is deepened by Jagger's adopted southern accent; and the song appears, like their earlier cover of "You Gotta Move," to say something substantive about the Stones and their life on the road and off stage, as the camera surveys a room full of somnolent performers and technicians, in various poses of exhaustion, sleep and relaxation. Our sense of this is heightened by the way individual portraits of the auditors are rendered by Albert Maysles' fluid camera, its qualities of intimacy, physical proximity, and personality carrying their own connotations of authenticity according to the aesthetics of direct cinema. Unsurprisingly, in their comments on the film, both Albert Maysles and Charlotte Zwerin single out this scene, with its contemplative depictions of Richards, Watts, Mick Taylor, and Jagger, for praise, Zwerin commenting on the moment when Watts meets the look of the camera: "It's so wonderful...such an honesty and frankness about it. Yes, this is a movie and I'm taking your picture and you're aware of it and you're looking at me and I'm looking at you... It's beautiful" (DVD commentary).

[39] By contrast, the treatment of the final song of this sequence, the Stones' rendition of "Love in Vain," is a distinct departure from the tenets of direct cinema, as the music track accompanies a montage of various slow motion images of the band—mostly Jagger—and its audience. Superimpositions and dissolves render Jagger's body, face, and scarf as a series of beautiful abstractions, their movement perfectly in sync with the audience and with the music that frames the visual display—an effect of unity heightened by red tinting. Albert Maysles defends the inclusion of this sequence—despite the artificiality of its techniques—on grounds that it too serves the aesthetic priorities of direct cinema, saying of the slow motion, that it's "a device to get you closer: closer to the music, closer to the Stones, closer to Mick" (DVD commentary). More pragmatically, Zwerin comments that the slow motion sequence was a "way to use 'Love in Vain,' a song we all loved, wanted to use, but couldn't think of a way" (DVD commentary). In wedding the rather hypnotic images to a song that is the quintessence of authentic "country" blues, the scene is suggestive both of Jagger's power over his audience—his voice enveloping an image of mass euphoria, just as tinting bathes it in colour—and likewise an image of the power of the blues to speak to countercultural youth. The transition from this scene back to Muscle Shoals heightens this effect. A sound bridge and the red tint link stage to studio, where Jagger appears to doze as he listens to the final notes of "Love in Vain." The end of the song and the disappearance of the red tint are synchronized with Jagger awakening. Thus the "Love in Vain" sequence is made to appear as dream or reverie, suggesting that the blues, and the ideologies of blackness associated with it, are dreams or fantasies shared by the performer and his youth audience.

Conclusion

... [the Rolling Stones] were no more 'street-fighting men' than the Beatles were wholesome, carefree mop-tops. The respective images of each group were based on strategic career choices (Garofalo 173).

[40] The Muscle Shoals sequence rehearses the Stones' connection to blues and to blackness and offers audio-visual confirmation of the authenticity of their music—and their stardom—based on that
connection. At the same time, it points to elements of fantasy at work in white performances of the blues and their reception by the largely-white youth audience of the late 1960s. In this way, Gimme Shelter primes its viewers for what rock critic Robert Christgau summarized as the ironies of its violent finale at Altamont, during which violence in the audience builds as the Stones perform.

[41] As Christgau reflected in 1972, it was these ironies—not just the tragedy of Meredith Hunter's death—that accounted for much of the symbolic mileage Altamont yielded for critics and commentaries that followed:

Time: The final month of the decade that spawned that unprecedented and probably insupportable contradiction in terms, mass bohemia, popularly known as the counterculture. Occasion: On America's ultimate frontier some three hundred thousand bohemians come together with their chosen images, five formerly lower-to middle-class Englishmen who fuse Afro-American music with European sensibility. Denoument: An Afro-American bohemian is murdered by a lower-class white Hell's Angel while the Englishmen do a song called "Sympathy for the Devil" [sic] (qtd. Ward, Stokes, and Tucker 446).

What Christgau identifies as ironies and what, in retrospect, are recognizable as the complex workings of class, race and gender difference in music and youth cultures of the hippie era, are in many ways the real focus of Gimme Shelter, its depiction of the Rolling Stones, and its fascination with Mick Jagger. That is, while the rock performances documented in Gimme Shelter clearly reach toward "sexual plasticity" as part of their assertion of countercultural freedom from the mainstream, the film also attests to how this new youth identity is constructed across multiple sites of difference—especially categories of race and class—that return to trouble the Stones' staging of rock masculinity.

[42] At the end of Gimme Shelter, we see the carefully orchestrated—and hugely successful—performance of countercultural masculinity that was Mick Jagger of the late 1960s slide into irrelevance as the crowd dissolves into race and class based violence, victims of the truly dangerous (if equally theatrical) masculine performances of the Hell's Angels. Jagger's control of stage and audience—complete and incomparably professional in all the previous performances documented by the Maysles—slips away as the stage yields to an audience that is, for the most part, more distracted and appalled by the violence that has erupted in their midst, than entranced the Stones' performance. In the approved manner of direct cinema, Gimme Shelter does not remark on the events that transpired during the Altamont concert, beyond those offered by its reflexive, film-within-a-film structure. Instead, the youth audience itself provides the final comment: the extended reverse angle on the audience that concludes the film offers an emotional response to and documentary record of the limitations of the transformational, countercultural masculinity that entranced concert crowds—and the film audience—for much of the Maysles' film. In its account of the Stones' tour, Gimme Shelter offers evidence of the structural contradictions of countercultural rock masculinity from which these limitations derive. In doing so, Gimme Shelter confirms the place of what Lawrence Grossberg calls the "rock formation" squarely within the ideologies of the dominant culture of the late 1960s—including its inequalities of...
race, sex, and class (143-48). At the end of the film, Jaggers’ powerlessness at this key moment of crisis functions as a metaphor for the limitations of the countercultural youth movement as a whole. It is an image of rock masculinity that—along with the violence of Altamont itself—highlights the fragility of the counterculture’s utopian belief in theatrical transformations of identity and its faith in what was, from 1968-1969, the "cultural revolution" of rock music.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS I am indebted to Cory Messenger for his comments on this essay—and for sharing his encyclopedic musical knowledge. Likewise, I thank Ann Kibbey and the anonymous referees at Genders for their useful feedback. Finally, I am grateful for the many thought-provoking seminar discussions in "Popular Music and Film," 2002-2008.

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