

The Rockumentaries, Direct Cinema,  
and  
the Politics of the 1960s

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## Abstract

*Monterey Pop* (1968), *Woodstock* (1970), and *Gimme Shelter* (1970) are all examples of what has become known as the first wave of the rockumentary, nonfiction films that document rock musicians and musical events using the observational methods associated with direct cinema. Yet, in documenting the multi-act rock festivals that were regarded as significant events within the 1960s American counterculture, the rockumentaries clearly depart from core direct cinema methods and philosophies. They do so in a number of ways; in their largely macro-political focus, their use of interviews, their employment of non-diegetic soundtrack music, and, in *Monterey Pop* and *Woodstock*, their movement away from the key concept of the backstage, in the process considerably reducing the possibility of the spontaneous, unscripted moment that represented the ultimate goal for direct cinema.

Ultimately, the evidence of the festival rockumentaries suggests a mismatch of methodology and subject matter, with the sheer size and scale of the rock festivals making it difficult to continue direct cinema's original micro-political focus. The closeness of the filmmakers' identification with their musical subject matter also creates difficulties, with the 1960s counterculture becoming more and more commercialized and what had originally been oppositional music quickly co-opted by the major music labels. Furthermore, the extent of rockumentaries' departure from direct cinema's methods and philosophies also suggests a distancing from the movement's original democratizing impulse and increasingly into the service of media spectacle, eventually providing the common ground for countercultural and mass commodity cultural convergence.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my late mother Nora Margaret Stapleton who died while I was completing it.

I would like to thank my supervisor Dr Kevin Fisher for his very fine editing and his insightful critique of my work. I would also like to thank my partner Cathy Helps for her support, encouragement and patience while I was pre-occupied with it and the other MFCO post-grads for their support, constant good humour and useful advice.

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## The Rockumentaries, Direct Cinema, and the Politics of the 1960s

### Introduction

The first wave of rockumentaries during the late 1960s and early 1970s were nonfiction films that documented rock and pop musicians and musical events such as tours and festivals using the observational methods associated with the direct cinema documentary movement. Direct cinema emerged in the United States in the late 1950s and early 1960s, enabled by technological advances that occurred at the time, such as the development of new lightweight handheld cameras and synchronized sound recording. Along with the slightly earlier French *cinéma vérité*<sup>1</sup> movement, which mixed observation with participation, direct cinema exemplified the ideological and aesthetic shifts in the documentary form that occurred in the years after World War II. Both direct cinema and *cinéma vérité* filmmakers were driven by a critique of what they saw as the paternalism and propaganda tendencies of earlier nonfiction films, particularly those of the German filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl, as well as the films produced by John Grierson and the British documentary movement. Yet, where the *cinéma vérité* filmmakers acknowledged their role within the film itself, the direct cinema practitioners sought to conceal their presence from the viewer. The early direct cinema filmmakers regarded the *cinéma vérité* principle of the camera as catalyst as disrupting and distorting the documentation of reality. Instead, they advocated as little editorial intrusion as possible. In that respect,

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<sup>1</sup> *Cinéma vérité* can be translated as “cinema truth.” Direct cinema is sometimes referred to as “American *cinéma vérité*,” See William Rothman, *Documentary Film Classics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 109.

they believed that a purely observational form of filmmaking could address the limitations of traditional forms of the documentary and could counter their use as propaganda simply by allowing the audience to see and hear for themselves, therefore giving them the opportunity to interpret the events depicted onscreen in their own way.

Chapter one “The Socio-Historical Background of Direct Cinema” will investigate the ways in which direct cinema deviates from pre-World War II forms of the documentary and also examine the philosophical differences between direct cinema and *cinéma vérité*. This chapter will explore direct cinema’s departures both in terms of its methodologies, its choice of subject matter, and also through its focus on groups and institutions that up till then had been largely excluded from the mainstream media. In this way, the direct cinema documentaries offered viewers a glimpse of people and places they had never seen before, documenting specific events in the daily lives of movie stars, classical musicians, diplomats, and politicians such as John F. Kennedy and his wife Jackie Kennedy in *Primary* (1960).<sup>2</sup> In addition, they featured behind the scenes depictions of the intimate moments of everyday people, such as Mrs. Fischer in *Happy Mother’s Day* (1963),<sup>3</sup> who were suddenly subjected to the focus of the media. While everyday Americans such as Mrs. Fischer could appear visibly uncomfortable in front of the filmmaker’s camera, celebrities such as John F. Kennedy were the perfect subjects for direct cinema because they were used to being photographed and could therefore appear to ignore the presence of the camera. That focus on celebrity revolved around spectator access to the “backstage” where the subject could be observed behind the scenes.

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<sup>2</sup> *Primary* (Robert Drew, USA, 1960).

<sup>3</sup> *Happy Mother’s Day* (Richard Leacock and Joyce Chopra, USA, 1963).

Celebrity subjects such as Kennedy brought with them pre-established identities and role expectations behind which the filmmakers could mask their intervention and against which they could define a heightened “authenticity” and insight into character.

The direct cinema practitioners also documented tours by popular musicians, for example the Beatles in *What's Happening! The Beatles in the USA* (1964) and Bob Dylan in *Don't Look Back* (1966).<sup>4</sup> *Don't Look Back's* focus on Dylan as a countercultural spokesperson emphasizes direct cinema's break with older documentary forms that often functioned to uphold the state and its institutions. The rockumentaries' focus on the latest trends in popular culture also served to highlight their departure from the subject matter of the pre-World War II documentaries. In fact, popular musicians held a particular interest for the direct cinema filmmakers because of the way they managed the relationship between what contemporary sociologist Erving Goffman would describe as their front and backstage personae, making them object lessons for more general processes of identity formation in Post-War American society.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, the rockumentaries' subject matter also presented obstacles for the direct cinema filmmakers, with backstage footage only able to be shot with the consent of the subject and popular musicians such as Bob Dylan already well-practiced and media-savvy practitioners in the process of identity construction, at all times striving for control of the production of their own public

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<sup>4</sup> *Jane* (D. A. Pennebaker, Richard Leacock, Hope Ryden, Gregory Shuker and Abbot Mills, USA, 1962), *What's Happening! The Beatles in the USA* (Albert Maysles and David Maysles, USA, 1964), *Meet Marlon Brando* (Albert Maysles and David Maysles, USA, 1965), *Don't Look Back* (D. A. Pennebaker, USA, 1966).

<sup>5</sup> Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Doubleday, 1959.

persona. While John F. Kennedy is often regarded as the first media-savvy politician, or at least the first to really understand “tele-presence,” the celebrity musicians in the rockumentaries took such practices of self-conscious image construction to another level.

Chapter two “Rock, Festivals, and Rockumentaries” will explore the rise of the festival rockumentary, through *Monterey Pop* (1968), *Woodstock* (1970), and *Gimme Shelter* (1970),<sup>6</sup> films that documented the multi-act rock festivals that were emerging as significant events within the 1960s American counterculture. It will examine some of their cinematic predecessors, for example earlier live music documentaries such as *Jazz Dance* (1954) and festival documentaries such as *Jazz on a Summer’s Day* (1958).<sup>7</sup> This chapter will also explore the roots of the 1960s rock festivals and the festival rockumentaries in the countercultural “happenings,” for example the Trips Festivals and the Human Be-Ins. In addition, chapter two will address how issues raised in *Don’t Look Back*, such as the level of identification (or over-identification) between the filmmaker and his rock star subject, would continue in the later rockumentaries, representing a clear departure from direct cinema’s original commitment to non-involvement.

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<sup>6</sup> *Monterey Pop* (D. A. Pennebaker, USA, 1968), *Woodstock* (Michael Wadleigh, USA, 1970), *Gimme Shelter* (Albert Maysles, David Maysles and Charlotte Zwerin, USA, 1970).

<sup>7</sup> *Jazz Dance* (Roger Tilton, USA, 1954). *Jazz on a Summer’s Day* (Aram Avakian and Bert Stern, USA, 1960).

Chapter three “The Rockumentaries and Direct Cinema” will explore the extent to which *Monterey Pop*, *Woodstock* and *Gimme Shelter* depart both from the canons of direct cinema practice and from the earlier rockumentaries, in terms of their macro-political focus, their use of interviews and non-diegetic soundtrack music and especially in their departure from the concept of the backstage. *Don't Look Back* had already forecast the difficulties for the direct cinema filmmakers when confronted by an image-conscious performer who resists being unmasked, a challenge that was to persist throughout the rockumentaries. While the filmmakers sought access to the backstage behind the onstage mask, their subjects often saw the films as merely an opportunity to promote themselves. As a result, both *Monterey Pop* and *Woodstock* move away from the direct cinema trope of the backstage and the juxtaposition of the public and private that had been a feature of earlier rockumentaries such as *Don't Look Back*. Whereas the sheer amount of backstage footage in *Don't Look Back* at least preserves the possibility of the unscripted moment that represented the ultimate goal for direct cinema, the backstage is all but absent from both *Monterey Pop* and *Woodstock*, thereby diminishing the chance for any possible contradiction of the performers' onstage personae.

Rather, in *Monterey Pop* and *Woodstock* the backstage has been replaced by the offstage, an in-between space where the performers can be seen (but generally not heard) in the company of other performers and industry “insiders.” Offstage, the performers are often visible to both the festival audience and the cinematic spectator, but the camera becomes more furtive, catching only fleeting and distanced shots of interactions from which it is denied any closer access. The inaudibility of the offstage reinforces the performers'

privileged status, and, in *Woodstock* especially, their separation from the festival audience. The trend in both films away from the key direct cinema concept of the backstage also represents a departure from direct cinema's original micro-political focus and a movement away from a setting in which the performers may be portrayed as everyday people. As such, *Monterey Pop* and *Woodstock* can be seen as signaling a shift away from direct cinema's original democratizing impulse.

Yet the backstage does return, albeit in a somewhat reconfigured form, in *Gimme Shelter*. In the second of two scenes in the Maysles brothers' editing suite the camera focuses exclusively on Rolling Stones' lead singer Mick Jagger watching replayed footage of an incident at the band's Altamont concert where an audience member by the name of Meredith Hunter was killed by one of the Hell's Angels motorcycle club who had been hired to provide security. Rather than the musician's backstage of *Don't Look Back*, the editing suite substitutes as the filmmaker's equivalent, with Jagger clearly out of his comfort zone, confronted by replays of a murder. In one respect, *Gimme Shelter* departs from every other direct cinema documentary and from the other rockumentaries, in going beyond mere observation and attempting an after-the-fact analysis of its own footage of the concert, although without offering any definitive conclusions. In another respect, the singling out of Jagger as an individual subject also suggests a return to original direct cinema philosophies and methods and to its focus on the micro-political. The scene elicits a glimpse of a very different Jagger from the rock star we see portrayed in the tour concert footage earlier in the film and because his persona is so carefully constructed even a brief glimpse behind the mask yields a dramatic effect.

Chapter three of this thesis will also explore other ways in which *Monterey Pop*, *Woodstock* and *Gimme Shelter* depart both from the earlier rockumentaries and from original direct cinema theory and practice. For example, *Monterey Pop* and *Woodstock* each include interviews conducted by the filmmakers themselves with members of the festival audiences. In their documenting of the audiences, the festival rockumentaries face the difficulty of fitting such large-scale mass-culture events within the scope of direct cinema methodologies. To this end, both *Monterey Pop* and *Woodstock* employ a largely macro-political focus, in contrast to the micro-political focus on individual subjects that was so much a part of earlier direct cinema documentaries and *Don't Look Back*. In order to represent the macro level of the festivals they are forced to draw upon representational strategies such as montage, establishing shots, generalization, and stereotyping. Such strategies were more associated with the pre-World War II forms of the documentary previously regarded as anathema to direct cinema, for example the films of John Grierson and the British documentary movement, those of the German filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl, and the Soviet montage films of the 1920s. In addition, where the early direct cinema practitioners had rejected the interview format, believing that it interfered with the naturalness and spontaneity of both the subject and the camera, the interview returns in both *Monterey Pop's* and (especially) *Woodstock's* documenting of the festival audiences. Furthermore, *Gimme Shelter's* reviewing of the Altamont concert footage with Mick Jagger and other members of the Rolling Stones is reminiscent of the deployment of the camera as a catalyst in *cinéma vérité*, an approach also rejected by the original direct cinema practitioners. Lastly, all three festival rockumentaries employ studio recordings of soundtrack songs, in contradiction of the original direct cinema prohibition

against non-diegetic soundtrack music. In *Monterey Pop* and *Woodstock* such music is used to establish the film's idealistic mood and in the latter to return to that mood over the film's final credits. In *Gimme Shelter* a studio recording of the film's Rolling Stones' title song is used to emphasize the dystopian nature of the film's Altamont scenes. Significantly, the non-diegetic soundtrack music is employed for persuasive effect, again in a manner that recalls the pre-World War II Griersonian documentaries.

Chapter four "The Rockumentaries and the Politics of the 1960s" will contextualize *Monterey Pop*, *Woodstock* and *Gimme Shelter* in terms of the social and political upheavals of the 1960s; the long-running Vietnam War, the confrontations on the streets of major American cities, as well as the tensions within the counterculture itself which eventually led to a sense of widespread disillusionment. As such, the rockumentaries reflect the disagreements between those who believed in collective political solutions and those who believed that the transformation of the self was the main prerequisite for achieving wider societal change. They also trace the shifting tensions between those who believed in individual spiritual liberation, for example through hallucinogenic drugs or Eastern spiritualities, and those who advocated a collective cultural transformation, such as through the formation of back-to-the-earth communes. For its part, *Monterey Pop* attempts to mediate such tensions in its representation of the Monterey festival as both a celebration of individual spiritual liberation and of collective countercultural unity. It portrays a context in which it is entirely possible to imagine a very different social order, but it dies so largely by ignoring the wider political context of the era, in particular the ever-escalating Vietnam War. On a much larger scale than *Monterey Pop*, *Woodstock*

represents the rock festival as essentially a communal experience, on the one hand acknowledging the political backdrop of the war, but also using it as an issue that unifies the diverse strands of the counterculture. Yet, where in *Woodstock* the disagreements within the counterculture remain beneath the surface, they become manifest in *Gimme Shelter*, released only eight months later. *Gimme Shelter* portrays the counterculture at the end of the 1960s, at a point of crisis, racked by tensions from within and unable to escape from the prevailing climate of violence that had overtaken contemporary American society.

Chapter five “The Rockumentaries and the Media” aims to situate the festival rockumentaries within the wider media context of the late 1960s and early 1970s. It will examine how the media itself also becomes a subject of the films, not only used to provide contextual information for the viewer, but also to highlight the contrast between mainstream media coverage and direct cinema’s own observation of the events. This chapter will also explore the ways in which the rockumentaries themselves became part of an increasingly media-saturated environment, with the dimensions of the social world increasingly defined by the media. The late 1960s were an era when the mainstream media industries were beginning to realize that there were profits to be made out of the counterculture and *Monterey Pop*, for example, represents the Monterey festival as part of the media-constructed “Summer of Love.” It was also a time when the entertainment and news medias were becoming increasingly interconnected and *Woodstock* constantly reflects this fact by making frequent self-conscious references to the festival’s reception in the mainstream media. In this respect, the mediation of the event becomes a

component of the event itself and an example of how the festivals and their representation in the festival rockumentaries became part of what Douglas Kellner has called the “media spectacle.”<sup>8</sup> *Woodstock* and the tour concert scenes of *Gimme Shelter* portray what may be the prototypical rock concert spectacle, one that not only encompasses the “rock star” performers, but also the passive, adoring, and largely undifferentiated mass audiences. However, there is an abrupt change in *Gimme Shelter*’s Altamont scenes to a situation in which the violence in the audience replaces the onstage musical performances as the more arresting spectacle, with the film’s portrayal of a succession of violent images becoming part of the broader representation of violence that prevailed in both the news and entertainment medias as the decade came to an end.

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<sup>8</sup> Kellner, *Media Spectacle*, 2-3.

## Chapter One

### The Socio-Historical Context of Direct Cinema

#### Relationship to Earlier Documentary Forms

*Monterey Pop* (1968), *Woodstock* (1970), and *Gimme Shelter* (1970)<sup>9</sup> are all examples of what subsequently became known as the “rockumentary,” documentaries focusing on rock musicians and musical events, made by filmmakers associated with the direct cinema movement and representing a comparatively late and arguably hybridized version of its observational methods. Direct cinema emerged in the United States in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Along with the slightly earlier French *cinéma vérité*<sup>10</sup> (“cinema truth”) movement, which mixed observation with participation, it exemplified the ideological and aesthetic shifts in the documentary form that occurred in the post-World War II era. The observational mode can be traced as far back as the beginnings of the film medium itself, with the Lumière brothers’ filming of a train coming into a station and the early “actualities.”<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, the 1920s Soviet filmmaker and theorist Dziga Vertov was more directly influential on both the observational and participatory forms of documentary, developing a concept he called the “Kino-Eye.” Kino-Eye or “Film-Eye” was regarded as “a special form of cinematic observation that could penetrate the essence

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<sup>9</sup> *Monterey Pop* (D. A. Pennebaker, USA, 1968), *Woodstock* (Michael Wadleigh, USA, 1970), *Gimme Shelter* (Albert Maysles, David Maysles and Charlotte Zwerin, USA, 1970).

<sup>10</sup> Direct cinema is sometimes referred to as “American *cinéma vérité*,” See William Rothman, *Documentary Film Classics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 109.

<sup>11</sup> Although originally derived from the French “*actualité*,” among English speakers the term “actuality” became a synonym for “reality.” See Brian Winston, *Claiming the Real: The Documentary Film Revisited* (London: British Film Institute, 1995), 13.

of the actual events.”<sup>12</sup> For Vertov the photographing of “life caught unawares” simply revealed “that which the eye doesn’t see,” although he also subsequently restructured that footage through editing in order that “all methods and means might serve to reveal and show the truth”<sup>13</sup>

As with *cinéma vérité* almost forty years later, Vertov’s documentaries featured a combination of observation and participation, explicitly acknowledging the filmmakers’ own role in the documentary by including them in the film. Vertov himself was strongly influenced by contemporary theories of futurism and especially Russian constructivism and he regarded the filmmaker as essentially a “cinema worker.”<sup>14</sup> As Richard Barsam has noted, for the constructivists the main responsibility of the artist was “to construct useful objects” and “to play an active part in the building of a new society.”<sup>15</sup> Films such as Vertov’s *The Man With the Movie Camera* (1929)<sup>16</sup> were characterized by their self-reflexivity, with the “deliberate artificiality” intended to help demystify the medium for audiences, representing what Eric Barnouw has termed “an avant-garde determination to suppress illusion in favor of a heightened awareness.”<sup>17</sup> As such, the rival tendencies of participation (aligned to formalism) and observation (aligned to realism) were already active in a dialectical way within Vertov’s work.

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<sup>12</sup> Richard M. Barsam, *Non-Fiction Film: A Critical History Revised and Expanded* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 70-71.

<sup>13</sup> Dziga Vertov, *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, ed. Annette Michelson, trans. Kevin O’Brien (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 41, 49

<sup>14</sup> Vertov, *Kino-Eye*, 49.

<sup>15</sup> Barsam, 69.

<sup>16</sup> *The Man with the Movie Camera* (Dziga Vertov, USSR, 1929).

<sup>17</sup> Erik Barnouw, *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 63.

### Technology and the Observational Mode

Yet, even in the early days of cinema observation was never “pure.” *The Man With the Movie Camera* was criticized for the extent of its “staging and contrivance” beyond that of Vertov’s earlier documentaries.<sup>18</sup> Subsequently, there was also considerable debate as to the extent of intervention and re-enactment in the films of the British realist filmmaker John Grierson and the British documentary movement, and, as Brian Winston has pointed out, for *Night Mail* (1936) real mail-sorters sorted mail in a rail coach constructed in the studio.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, the German filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl included both material taken from other locations and also re-enacted sequences in *Triumph of the Will* (1935), her documentary of the 1934 Nazi Party congress.<sup>20</sup> In fact, documentary makers in the pre-World War II era often had no other choice but to re-enact scenes because the bulky nature of their equipment made a purely observational style difficult and at times impossible.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, while smaller 16mm cameras were available from the 1930s they were rejected by many filmmakers because of their allegedly “sub-standard” picture quality and synchronized sound recording was seldom attempted because the equipment at the time was so large and cumbersome.<sup>22</sup>

The subsequent rebirth of the observational mode of documentary in the late 1950s and early 1960s was largely enabled by a number of technological innovations that had

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<sup>18</sup> Barnouw, *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film*, 65.

<sup>19</sup> Winston, *Claiming the Real*, 120 -122. *Night Mail* (Harry Watt and Basil Wright, UK, 1936).

<sup>20</sup> Winston, 120-122. *Triumph of the Will* (Leni Riefenstahl, Germany, 1935).

<sup>21</sup> Brian Winston, “The Documentary Film as Scientific Inscription,” in *Theorising Documentary*, Michael Renov ed. (New York: Routledge, 1993), 42.

<sup>22</sup> Winston, *Claiming the Real*, 144.

emerged during World War II. The widespread use of hand-held cameras for war coverage led to the development of what Barsam has described as new “lightweight, compact and durable” 16mm models “with improved lenses and interchangeable parts.”<sup>23</sup> At the same time, advances in synchronized sound recording continued throughout the 1950s, culminating in the development of a magnetic tape recorder capable of synchronous sound, meaning that camera operators and sound recorders could now work separately. In addition, as Barsam has noted, from around 1960 the vacuum tubes in tape recorders began to be replaced by transistors, thereby reducing the weight of the tape recorder “from several hundred pounds to only twenty.”<sup>24</sup>

Such innovations in camera technology and synchronized sound recording also had an influence on the resulting “look” of the films. The observational documentary-makers evolved a visual style that gave the appearance of being informal and spontaneous and even cherished “mistakes” such as poor lighting and abrupt camera movements.<sup>25</sup> The distinctiveness of the style clearly differentiated the *cinéma vérité* and direct cinema films from the Griersonian documentaries, with their conventionally “higher” production values. The new lightweight equipment also made possible what Barnouw has termed “an intimacy of observation” that was new to the documentary and the synchronized sound gave the filmmakers the ability to record “talking people.”<sup>26</sup> This led to a much closer and more concentrated focus on individual people speaking for themselves rather than the more generalized “types” portrayed in the traditional re-enacted documentaries. It also

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<sup>23</sup> Barsam, *Non-Fiction Film: A Critical History*, 302.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Barsam, 301-302.

<sup>26</sup> Barnouw, *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film*, 231, 234.

helps to explain the micro-political focus of both direct cinema and cinéma vérité, in contrast to the largely macro-political focus of the earlier documentary forms. In addition, filming was now possible almost anywhere and anytime, not just in controlled studio environments, the resulting image was of a much higher quality than previously, and the films became much cheaper and easier to produce, leading to a new generation of younger filmmakers interested in addressing a far wider range of subject matter.

### **Parallel Developments in Fictional and Documentary Realism**

The revival of the observational mode of documentary must also be seen against the backdrop of demographic change that occurred in the post-World War II years, resulting in a much younger overall population in both Europe and the United States. That demographic change also contributed to an increasingly widespread degree of generational dissatisfaction and an unprecedented questioning of established institutions both in the cinema and in society as a whole. At the same time, as Barsam has pointed out, there was also a growing internationalization, with a greater understanding on the part of the younger generation of “the language of film” which transcended national boundaries.<sup>27</sup> The mood of the times manifested itself in a new cinematic realism, not only seen in the documentary, but also in the fiction films of the Italian neo-realists, the British free cinema movement and the post-war French cinema that became known as the French new wave.<sup>28</sup> There were strong similarities between the realism espoused by the cinéma vérité and direct cinema filmmakers and the French new wave aesthetic as articulated by the critic Andre Bazin who theorized the existence of an “integral realism,”

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<sup>27</sup> Barsam, *Non-Fiction Film: A Critical History*, 300-301.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

mechanically produced by the (cinematic) apparatus.”<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, both fictional and documentary movements were driven by a desire to produce films that more accurately reflected the times in which they were made. Both were cinematically and (to a lesser extent) politically radical, with shared principles, and both also used everyday life as their subject matter and routinely deployed non-actors and natural settings in their films.

### **As a Reaction to the Propaganda Documentary**

Both cinéma vérité and direct cinema represented a clear philosophical break with the documentary’s former role as a means of persuasion.<sup>30</sup> They were driven by a critique of what they regarded as the paternalism and propaganda tendencies of earlier nonfiction films, such as those produced by John Grierson and the British documentary movement.<sup>31</sup> At first, the British documentary movement films were produced under the auspices of the Empire Marketing Board and then from 1933 to 1937 by filmmakers who were part of the General Post Office Film Unit.<sup>32</sup> Consequently, they functioned largely as government propaganda, tending to promote a view of an uncritical relationship between the state and its citizens, with their main emphasis being on what Ian Aitken has described as “the role of the state in ensuring social unity.”<sup>33</sup> Although Grierson conceived of the state “not as a centralized agency but as an assembly of corporate

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<sup>29</sup> Andre Bazin quoted in Winston, *Claiming the Real*, 122.

<sup>30</sup> Michael Renov, “Toward a Poetics of Documentary,” in *Theorising Documentary*, ed. Michael Renov (New York: Routledge, 1993), 29.

<sup>31</sup> Barnouw, *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film*, 228.

<sup>32</sup> Barsam, *Non-Fiction Film A Critical History*, 89-90.

<sup>33</sup> Ian Aitken, “Introduction: Grierson’s Theory of Documentary Film,” in *The Documentary Film Movement: An Anthology*, ed. Ian Aitken (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 36.

institutions which regulated and administered social life for the national good,” he is quoted as saying that “when the state constrained individualism or sectarianism in the interests of social unity, it was exercising ‘good totalitarianism’.”<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, in the decades before and immediately after World War II the Griersonian mode dominated public service documentary practices in many countries around the world, including those in France and Canada (Grierson founded the National Film Board of Canada in 1939).<sup>35</sup> In Bill Nichols’ words, it “strove to orient the viewer toward a particular perspective of the world that called for national consensus on the values and beliefs advanced by the film, making the assumption that the government of the nation served the common good.”<sup>36</sup>

Many of the British documentary movement films featured the BBC English tones of an authoritative male voiceover narration, often supplemented by non-diegetic soundtrack music and at times by poetry for added emotional appeal. *Night Mail* is a typical example of the use of these formal devices, using classical string music by the British composer Benjamin Britten and poetry by W. H. Auden to promote the role of the Post Office in unifying the British nation. On the one hand, documentaries such as *Night Mail*, *Industrial Britain* (1933) and *Coal Face* (1935)<sup>37</sup> portrayed working-class British people on the screen, something that had seldom been done previously (except as comic figures). On the other hand, those everyday people were never really permitted to speak for

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<sup>34</sup> Aitken, “Introduction: Grierson’s Theory of Documentary Film,” 36, 37.

<sup>35</sup> Winston, *Claiming the Real*, 133. Aitken, 4.

<sup>36</sup> Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 146.

<sup>37</sup> *Industrial Britain* (John Grierson and Robert Flaherty, UK, 1933), *Coal Face* (John Grierson, UK, 1935).

themselves, the paternalistic voiceover narration instructed viewers how to interpret the visuals, and the film's "message" was reinforced by the accompanying music. In the end, the Griersonian documentaries do not question anything, but instead simply uphold and reinforce the political and economic status quo with all its inherent social inequalities. The clear assumption being communicated in the films is that the government and its institutions will always act in the best interests of the people and that, with its implicit truth claim, the documentary form itself can play an important role in ensuring national unity.

The Griersonian documentaries functioned as a form of social persuasion, promoting the interests of the nation state, but in doing so they shared an uncomfortable proximity with the Nazi propaganda films of the German filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl. Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* is a document of a 1934 Nazi Party rally in Nuremberg, but its documentary status is not so much compromised by Riefenstahl's meticulous planning and rehearsal but by the fact that it was produced, as Brian Winston has suggested, "by order of the Fuhrer."<sup>38</sup> The rally and the film were planned together and the filmmaker was entirely dependent on the willing co-operation of the Nazi Party. She was therefore concerned to present Hitler and the other Nazi officials at all times in the best possible light.<sup>39</sup> The predominant utopian tone of the speeches (masking a truly dystopian reality), was accentuated by Riefenstahl's deployment of highly romantic photographic effects, such as filming her subjects in darkness by the light of flaming torches, and her use of stirring Wagnerian soundtrack music for added emotional and persuasive effect. In

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<sup>38</sup> Winston, *Claiming the Real*, 73.

<sup>39</sup> Barnouw, *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film*, 102.

hindsight, there were clear similarities between Riefenstahl's films and the Griersonian documentaries from the same era; both promoted the nation state, both employed evocative photographic effects and both used non-diegetic soundtrack music for persuasive purposes. In any event, the proximity between them merely confirmed the cinéma vérité and direct cinema practitioners' rejection of all such propaganda devices within the documentary.

Yet, the documentary form was used for propaganda purposes by all sides during World War II, and, although the films were generally produced relatively cheaply, much greater resources were put at the filmmakers' disposal than in the pre-war years. These wartime documentaries tended to take a very clearly defined position, one that romanticized the home nation and the righteousness of their cause and demonized the enemy while at the same time sympathizing with the victims. In most countries they were either produced by film units that had been co-opted into the armed forces or that had been placed directly under government control. Typically, the films employed formal devices such as non-diegetic soundtrack music and an authoritative voiceover narration to establish and reinforce their propaganda message.<sup>40</sup> The many films that made up Frank Capra's *Why We Fight* series (1943-1945)<sup>41</sup> in the United States exemplify the wartime propaganda documentary, variously depicting, in Barsam's words, "Nazi aggression and brutality, the major battles of the war, and the impact of pre-war and war efforts on American public opinion."<sup>42</sup> Significantly, much of the footage seen in the newsreels and wartime training

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<sup>40</sup> Barsam, *Non-Fiction Film: A Critical History*, 174.

<sup>41</sup> *Why We Fight* Documentary Series (Frank Capra, USA, 1943-45).

<sup>42</sup> Barsam, 224.

films was filmed on handheld 16mm cameras and these films reached a far wider audience than any previous nonfiction form. Consequently, while the pictures were often shaky or blurred, the audience became familiar with the documentaries' visual style and began to perceive their tropes as markers of realism and authenticity.<sup>43</sup> This perception contributed to the audience's acceptance of similarly low fidelity television news footage from the early 1950s and also to their acceptance of the early *cinéma vérité* and direct cinema documentaries.

### **Cinéma Vérité**

With the similarities between Griersonian and Nazi propaganda documentaries becoming disturbingly apparent in retrospect, the years following World War II were marked by a growing suspicion towards all forms of persuasion within the documentary. Both *cinéma vérité* in France and direct cinema in the United States shared similar ideological critiques of the pre-World War II documentaries but they developed very different methods to counter the tendencies towards nationalism and paternalism that were a feature of the earlier forms. Nichols has identified the key divergence between direct cinema and *cinéma vérité* as one of observation versus participation, with *cinéma vérité* an example of what he calls "the participatory mode of documentary," a mode which, in the manner of Vertov, includes an investigation of "the ethics and politics of the encounter" within the film itself.<sup>44</sup> Where the direct cinema practitioners were primarily concerned with the ethics of non-intervention, the *cinéma vérité* filmmakers were more concerned with the politics of involvement. At the same time, Nichols also acknowledges

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<sup>43</sup> Barsam, *Non-Fiction Film: A Critical History*, 302.

<sup>44</sup> Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, 116.

that these categories are not mutually exclusive and in fact cinéma vérité involves a mixture of both observation and participation, with the filmmaker a visible participant onscreen and the camera not only observing, but also at times acting as a “catalyst.”<sup>45</sup>

### **Cinéma Vérité in Context**

Cinéma vérité emerged as a method and a philosophy in an era that saw the dismantling of many of the old European colonial empires (including the French) and the resulting debates led to ethnographic filmmakers such as Jean Rouch questioning the implicitly colonial position expressed in their own earlier documentaries.<sup>46</sup> As anthropologists and sociologists, they were well aware of the issues around participation and observation that had arisen in anthropological fieldwork.<sup>47</sup> This motivated Rouch and his colleague the sociologist Edgar Morin to turn their ethnographic investigation back onto France and French people. In *Chronicle of a Summer* (1961),<sup>48</sup> an example of reverse ethnography, they focused both on Parisians (“this strange tribe living in Paris”) and the previously neglected younger demographic that was subsequently also to be the subject of the direct cinema documentaries. They deployed a traditional documentary technique, the interview, but dropped the voiceover narration that was common to a majority of previous ethnographic documentaries and also to the public education films in the Griersonian mode that dominated the French documentary tradition.<sup>49</sup> As a consequence, in *Chronicle of a Summer* there are no assertions that have, to use Rothman’s expression,

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<sup>45</sup> Barnouw, *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film*, 253.

<sup>46</sup> Barnouw, 253-254.

<sup>47</sup> Winston, *Claiming the Real*, 186.

<sup>48</sup> *Chronicle of a Summer* (Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin, France, 1961).

<sup>49</sup> Winston, 183.

“absolute authority.”<sup>50</sup> In the manner of Vertov, the cinéma vérité filmmakers also experimented with self-reflexivity and Rouch and Morin explicitly acknowledged their own role in the documentary by including themselves in the film both as interviewers and commentators and significantly as part of an onscreen discussion at the end of the film. Their onscreen participation emphasized the fact that they too were equally subject to the documentary’s investigative focus and served to highlight, rather than attempt to hide, the inevitability of an editorial bias.

### **Cinéma Vérité Methods and Philosophies**

One of the major issues that both the observational and participatory documentaries were forced to address was the extent to which the presence of the camera influenced events. While some direct cinema filmmakers, for example the Maysles brothers and Frederick Wiseman, attempted to minimize its effect,<sup>51</sup> Rouch felt the presence of the camera caused people to act in ways that were actually “truer to their nature than might otherwise be the case.”<sup>52</sup> Hence in *Chronicle of a Summer* Rouch and Morin used the camera as a means of provocation, as exemplified by the scene in which the interviewer (Morin) questions the interview subject, a young Italian woman called Marilou, with an insistence that verges on interrogation. The underlying assumption was that such provocation could bring about what Rouch termed “moments of revelation.”<sup>53</sup> Rouch’s intention with cinéma vérité was “to affirm that the world on film is capable of revealing its own reality,

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<sup>50</sup> Rothman, *Documentary Film Classics*, 110.

<sup>51</sup> Barnouw, *Documentary: A Brief History of the Non-Fiction Film*, 253.

<sup>52</sup> Jean Rouch quoted in Barnouw, 254.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

its own truth, cinema truth.”<sup>54</sup> However, another contemporary French documentary-maker, Chris Marker, was much more skeptical about its use, at least until his 1963 film *Le Joli Mai*<sup>55</sup> (also a study of Paris and Parisians). Marker continued to use a voiceover commentary in the traditional style, but his tone was anything but traditional and elitist, instead being witty, ironical and subversive rather than an authoritative “voice of God.”<sup>56</sup> What Rouch, Morin, and Marker had in common was that they put themselves in front of the camera and it is this self-reflexivity that marks the *cinéma vérité* filmmakers’ method and most clearly distinguishes them from their direct cinema counterparts.<sup>57</sup>

### **Similarities between Direct Cinema and Cinéma Vérité**

The American practitioners of direct cinema were generally less overtly political than the *cinéma vérité* filmmakers, but they too were concerned to differentiate themselves from earlier documentary forms. Both direct cinema and *cinéma vérité* were committed to what Barsam has called “the realistic observation of society.”<sup>58</sup> They emerged around the same time in the late 1950s and represented a distinct break with documentary tradition. That break was not only in method and philosophy, but also in personnel, with many more women involved in the filmmaking process, as producers, directors and editors. This was in sharp contrast to earlier documentary movements and also to Hollywood cinema in which these areas of filmmaking were almost exclusively male domains. In

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<sup>54</sup> Rothman, *Documentary Film Classics*, 118.

<sup>55</sup> *Le Joli Mai* (Chris Marker, France, 1963).

<sup>56</sup> Winston, *Claiming the Real*, 184. Barnouw, *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film*, 255.

<sup>57</sup> Winston, 184.

<sup>58</sup> Barsam, *Non-Fiction Film: A Critical History*, 303.

addition, both cinéma vérité and direct cinema eschewed any form of re-enactment and believed that any conventional “mistakes,” such as inadequate lighting or unexpected camera movements, should be kept in. Both documentary movements therefore had what Barnouw has called a “democratizing” effect, in the choice and presentation of their subject matter and also in their desire to avoid what they regarded as “editorializing.”<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, both strongly rejected the propaganda devices that typified the Griersonian style of documentary, as exemplified by the authoritative voiceover narration (always by an elitist spokesman) and the use of persuasive devices such as photographic effects and non-diegetic soundtrack music.

### **Differences between Direct Cinema and Cinéma Vérité**

“We had a whole bunch of rules. We were shooting handheld, no tripods, no lights, no questions, never ask anybody to do anything.”

Richard Leacock<sup>60</sup>

While they were influenced by cinéma vérité,<sup>61</sup> the direct cinema documentarians also sought to distance themselves from it by championing what amounted to what Tim O’Farrell has described as “an ethos of minimum intervention.”<sup>62</sup> In contrast to cinéma vérité’s acknowledgment of the filmmaker’s role within the film itself, the direct cinema practitioners sought to hide their presence from the viewer. They disagreed with the cinéma vérité belief that the camera could be a catalyst, often deliberately choosing as

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<sup>59</sup> Barnouw, *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film*, 262.

<sup>60</sup> Richard Leacock interviewed in *Cinema Verite: Defining the Moment* (Peter Wintonick, Canada, 1999).

<sup>61</sup> Barsam, *Non-Fiction Film: A Critical History*, 302.

<sup>62</sup> Tim O’Farrell, “No Direction Home: Looking Forward from *Don’t Look Back*,” *Senses of Cinema* 38 (2006), [http://www.sensesofcinema.com/2006/38/no\\_direction\\_home](http://www.sensesofcinema.com/2006/38/no_direction_home).

subjects characters who were distracted by a crisis of their own and which then drew their attention away from the presence of the filmmaker.<sup>63</sup> This implied, although somewhat unconvincingly, that it was possible to ignore the presence of a cameraperson and a sound recorder even in a relatively small room. At least in the early days, the direct cinema filmmakers also rejected the interview format that was a central feature of *Chronicle of a Summer*, *Le Joli Mai*, and later cinéma vérité documentaries such as Marcel Ophuls' *The Sorrow and the Pity* (1969).<sup>64</sup> Above all, they were firmly opposed to what they saw as any editorial intrusion, their stance best summed up by one of the movement's founders, Robert Drew, who was quoted as saying at the time "The minute I sense I'm being told the answer, I tend to start rejecting it."<sup>65</sup> Central to their method and complementing their rejection of any editorial intervention was what Barsam has described as "the presentation of disparate material as if it were equivalent."<sup>66</sup> In this respect they believed that a purely observational form of filmmaking could address the limitations of the traditional re-enacted documentary and counter its use as propaganda by allowing the audience to see and hear for themselves, in the process giving them the opportunity to interpret the events depicted onscreen in their own way.

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<sup>63</sup> Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, 111.

<sup>64</sup> Barnouw, *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film*, 260. *The Sorrow and the Pity* (Marcel Ophuls, France, 1969).

<sup>65</sup> Barnouw, 236.

<sup>66</sup> Barsam, *Non-Fiction Film: A Critical History*, 304.

### **Direct Cinema and Technology**

In Barsam's words, direct cinema aimed "to capture a carefully selected aspect of reality as directly as possible."<sup>67</sup> Consequently, to an even greater extent than the practitioners of *cinéma vérité*, the direct cinema filmmakers were dependent on the technological innovations that enabled them to get closer, be (slightly) less conspicuous, and allowed them increased mobility and therefore greater flexibility in their choice of subject matter. The new lightweight cameras permitted a much closer degree of observation than had previously been imagined, resulting in a closer, more intimate image. This not only enhanced the direct relationship between filmmaker and subject, but also the relationship between viewer and subject. In addition, the recently invented synchronized sound recorders allowed the filmmakers to transcribe the sounds of everyday life, and, as Rothman has described, to record people "speaking their own words in their own voices."<sup>68</sup> Synchronized sound also meant that extraneous environmental sounds were picked up by the tape recorder and this contributed further to the enhanced perception of "reality."<sup>69</sup>

### **Direct Cinema and Hollywood**

The direct cinema filmmakers not only rejected traditional forms of the documentary, but they also set themselves up against Hollywood. Throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s the Hollywood studios had been experiencing economic difficulties, with declining audiences caused by the population drift to the suburbs, the advent of television, and

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<sup>67</sup> Barsam, 302.

<sup>68</sup> Rothman. *Documentary Film Classics*, 110.

<sup>69</sup> Barsam, *Non-Fiction Film: A Critical History*, 302-303.

competition for the discretionary dollar from an ever-increasing array of consumer products.<sup>70</sup> They began to concentrate all their resources on producing a small number of spectacular big budget movies each year, frequently historical epics such as *The Ten Commandments* (1956), *Ben Hur* (1959), and *Cleopatra* (1963).<sup>71</sup> They moved away from the depiction of the lives and aspirations of “ordinary” Americans and away from what Rothman has called “the dialectic between the public and the private” that had characterized the Hollywood films of the classical era. As he suggests, in the mainstream Hollywood movies of the late 1950s the world on film was “a self-contained universe that was all but unimaginable as real.”<sup>72</sup> The implication was that direct cinema arrived in the United States at a time when the “real” concerns of ordinary Americans were largely absent from the screen. In fact, that lack of relevance extended across all sections of the popular media and also characterized much of the popular music of the era and especially its use in Hollywood fictional films. In that regard, direct cinema’s “realistic” focus on rock music and musicians in the later rockumentaries can be seen as at least in part a reaction to what Keir Keightley has described as the “constructed and artificial” nature of the likes of the Elvis Presley films which were little more than star vehicles for the popular singer.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Linda Williams and Michael Hammond, “The Sixties: Introduction,” in *Contemporary American Cinema*, eds. Linda Williams and Michael Hammond (Maidenhead: Open University/McGraw Hill), 4-5.

<sup>71</sup> *The Ten Commandments* (Cecil B. DeMille, USA, 1956), *Ben-Hur* (William Wyler, USA, 1959), *Cleopatra* (Joseph L. Mankiewicz, USA, 1963).

<sup>72</sup> Rothman, *Documentary Film Classics*, 117, 118.

<sup>73</sup> Keir Keightley, “The Music Industry in Anglo-American Film,” in *Movie Music: The Film Reader*, ed. Kay Dickinson (London: Routledge, 2003). 177.

### Direct Cinema and Television

Direct cinema also emerged in the era when television came into its own, its signal beaming into the living rooms of a majority of middle-class Americans. TV rapidly became the nation's most popular visual medium and as a result the most powerful outlet for advertising the consumer products of the day. As Rothman has pointed out, in the early days it was primarily a live medium where "masks had often slipped, or cracked, or (had) inadvertently been put on not quite straight."<sup>74</sup> By 1960 however, that was no longer the case, with genuinely live shows (and unplanned incidents) becoming increasingly rare. The nightly television news was presented by newscasters who addressed the camera directly and instructed their viewers how they should interpret what was happening onscreen in an authoritative tone very reminiscent of the elitist voiceover narration that was a feature of the Griersonian style of documentary. At the time television was still black and white but it quickly replaced the older black and white media (such as newsreels and newspaper photographs) as, in Barsam's words, the principal source of visual news reporting.<sup>75</sup> As a result, the early direct cinema documentaries benefitted from the audience's familiarity with the black and white images of television news, as well as the culturally conditioned perception that black and white footage shot by handheld cameras was somehow more "realistic."

Whereas *cinéma vérité* practitioners such as Rouch and Morin came from academic (anthropological and sociological) backgrounds, many of the early direct cinema filmmakers had worked for Robert Drew Associates, the television production arm of

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<sup>74</sup> Rothman, *Documentary Film Classics*, 119.

<sup>75</sup> Barsam, *Non-Fiction Film: A Critical History*, 302.

Time, Inc. Consequently, television came to be regarded as the ideal exhibition outlet for the first direct cinema documentaries, especially with the Federal Communications Commission having emphasized the broadcasters' responsibility "to address issues of general public interest through public affairs programming."<sup>76</sup> The Drew Associates documentaries were all feature-length films but the earliest examples were not designed to be shown in movie theatres. Instead, they were intended for the much larger television audience. While *Primary* (1960) was rejected by all the major networks, a number of subsequent Drew Associates documentaries such as *Crisis: Behind a Presidential Commitment* (1962) and *The Chair* (1963) were shown on ABC, on prime-time network television.<sup>77</sup>

In fact, the close-up focus on individual human beings and the closer degree of observation that the new lightweight cameras and synchronized sound allowed made the original direct cinema documentaries ideally suited for television. They were broadcast as news and Richard Leacock has described how the direct cinema filmmakers saw "the new news reporting potential' of the equipment as "electrifying."<sup>78</sup> Yet, rather than being a form of investigative journalism, the resulting documentaries simply allowed viewers a behind the scenes glimpse of people and places they had never seen before. As Rothman has suggested, "they did not probe beneath the surface; all they did was open doors."<sup>79</sup> Nevertheless, at least the first time they were aired, they functioned as news. However,

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<sup>76</sup> Barsam, 305.

<sup>77</sup> Barnouw, *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film*, 238. *Primary* (Robert Drew, USA, 1960), *Crisis: Behind a Presidential Commitment* (Richard Leacock, USA, 1962), *The Chair* (Richard Leacock, D. A. Pennebaker and Gregory Shuker, USA, 1963).

<sup>78</sup> Richard Leacock interviewed in *Cinema Verite: Defining the Moment*.

<sup>79</sup> Rothman, *Documentary Film Classics*, 119-120.

seemingly almost inevitably, the unpredictability of direct cinema's methods soon caused considerable uneasiness from both the television networks and their sponsors. For example, Richard Leacock and Joyce Chopra's *Happy Mother's Day* (1963),<sup>80</sup> a subsequent documentary that focused on the mother of quintuplets, Mrs. Fischer, and her family, was never shown on American television in its original form. Instead, the ABC network exhibited a heavily edited version of the same footage, taking out anything that might be deemed in any way controversial. They re-titled it as *The Fischer Quintuplets* (sponsored by "Beechnut Babyhoods") and added narration by a newsman, sometimes on camera, promoting the town as a typical American town and thereby transforming it back into the propaganda mode of documentary mode that the direct cinema filmmakers had so firmly rejected.<sup>81</sup>

### **The Choice of Subject Matter**

Although ABC's rejection of the original *Happy Mother's Day* made exhibition on network television a much less attractive option, it left the direct cinema filmmakers free to establish their own audience in feature films.<sup>82</sup> The fact these documentaries were independently produced rather than commissioned for a purpose by either public or private institutions lent the filmmakers more autonomy in the choice and treatment of their subject matter. At the same time, they were not yet subject to the commercial pressures that arose with the bigger budget documentaries later in the decade, especially with the box-office success of *Woodstock*, and were able to take advantage of the

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<sup>80</sup> *Happy Mother's Day* (Richard Leacock and Joyce Chopra, USA, 1963).

<sup>81</sup> Barnouw, *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film*, 238-240.

<sup>82</sup> Rothman, *Documentary Film Classics*, 121.

stronger and more independent system of distribution for nonfiction films that had begun to develop in the United States.<sup>83</sup>

### **The Focus on Everyday People**

The choice of subject was an important issue for the direct cinema filmmakers and they tended to focus on groups and institutions that had up till then been largely excluded from the mainstream media. On the one hand, politicians and “celebrity” entertainers were usually only seen in publicity shots and never behind the scenes and on the other hand “everyday” Americans were almost totally absent from the screen. Where the pre-World War II Griersonian documentaries had featured everyday people but portrayed them as little more than “types,” the direct cinema filmmakers put them on the screen and allowed them to speak for themselves as individuals. Paradoxically, this actually reduced the chances of wider recognition for the documentaries, with difficulties translating the vernacular at times limiting their chances of international exhibition.<sup>84</sup> Nevertheless, the direct cinema documentaries were unusual in their portrayals of everyday people, such as Mrs. Fischer and her family in *Happy Mother’s Day*, the staff and students at Northeast High School in Frederick Wiseman’s *High School* (1968), and the bible salesmen in the Maysles brothers’ film *Salesman* (1968).<sup>85</sup>

Direct cinema documentaries also focused on a range of institutions seldom, if ever, portrayed before onscreen. They did so through what Stephen Mamber has called a

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<sup>83</sup> Barsam, *Non-Fiction Film: A Critical History*, 300.

<sup>84</sup> Barnouw, *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film*, 262.

<sup>85</sup> *High School* (Frederick Wiseman, USA, 1968), *Salesman* (Albert Maysles and David Maysles, USA, 1968).

“personality-oriented structure,” involving a camera’s eye view of selected individuals who then became characters as much as any character in a fiction film.<sup>86</sup> Frequently, the documentaries also showed how those individuals became dehumanized within the same institutions. The closeness and intimacy of the image enhanced the relationship between subject and viewer and the perception of the characters as “real.” In *Happy Mother’s Day*, Mrs. Fischer and her family come to represent the family as an American institution, just as Aberdeen, South Dakota comes to represent small-town USA. *Salesman’s* observation of a group of door-to-door bible salesmen enables the filmmakers to show the place of religion in the lives of ordinary Americans. The documentary also provides a never-before-seen look at lower socio-economic neighborhoods in Boston and Florida that then become typical of similar neighborhoods throughout the country. Frederick Wiseman’s documentaries, for example *High School* and *Titicut Follies* (1967),<sup>87</sup> help to expose the contradictions in American society by providing a critical behind-the-scenes view of a high school and a hospital for the criminally insane. They do so through a series of observed encounters with individual characters, with the institutions themselves then becoming representative of the many similar institutions throughout the country.

The documentaries also focused on the private side of life.<sup>88</sup> They offered behind the scenes depictions of intimate moments, both of everyday people who were suddenly subject to the focus of the media and also of so-called celebrities who were presented as

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<sup>86</sup> Stephen Mamber quoted in Barsam, *Non-Fiction Film: A Critical History*, 329-330.

<sup>87</sup> *Titicut Follies* (Frederick Wiseman, USA, 1967).

<sup>88</sup> Rothman, *Documentary Film Classics*, 119.

everyday people. As Winston has pointed out, in both instances it was this focus on the private realm that was new.<sup>89</sup> In fact, in *Happy Mother's Day* Mrs. Fischer is not exactly an everyday person, having recently acquired “celebrity” status following the birth of her quintuplets. Yet this scenario, reminiscent of the classical Hollywood myth where anybody can become a “star,” makes the story, giving the filmmakers (and the viewers) a chance to observe her as an everyday person who, to use Winston’s phrase, is “caught in the accidental glare of publicity.”<sup>90</sup> It enables the filmmakers to juxtapose shots of Mrs. Fischer in a public context with shots of her (seemingly) in private, a juxtaposition that is crucial to almost every direct cinema documentary. However, the central tension in *Happy Mother's Day* arises from the fact that she is visibly aware of the camera, and, while at times she seems to be enjoying its attention, at other times she appears highly uncomfortable in its presence.<sup>91</sup> Her reaction is in sharp contrast to the celebrity subjects of other direct cinema documentaries who appear very much at ease in front of the camera and where any tension that exists arises from the perceived discrepancy between their pre-established public identities and their observed private behaviour.

### **The Focus on Celebrity**

Paul Arthur has written of direct cinema’s “central and obsessive attachment to subjects under public scrutiny, to performers in one guise or another.” He goes on to point out that the focus on celebrity helped to maintain the fiction absolutely central to direct cinema

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<sup>89</sup> Winston, *Claiming the Real*, 155.

<sup>90</sup> Winston, *Claiming the Real*, 155.

<sup>91</sup> Rothman, *Documentary Film Classics*, 147.

“that camera observation is part of a natural landscape of behaviour.”<sup>92</sup> In this respect, celebrities are the perfect subjects for direct cinema because they are used to being photographed and can therefore appear to ignore the presence of the camera. This in turn helps to create the illusion that we, the viewers, are directly observing reality on the screen. Unlike the case with an everyday subject such as Mrs. Fischer, there is little or no tension between filmmaker and subject. The relative absence of tension enables the camera to fulfill its designated direct cinema function of merely observing and it also allows the filmmaker to return to being an unacknowledged presence behind the camera.

The direct cinema filmmakers often chose as their subjects people whose attention was demanded elsewhere, or, as Nichols has suggested, subjects who were “caught up in pressing demands or a crisis of their own.”<sup>93</sup> That distraction not only drew the subject’s attention away from the presence of the camera, but also captured the attention of the cinematic spectator and caused them to identify with the character in crisis, in much the same way as they might identify with a character in a fictional film. Several direct cinema documentaries featured a behind-the-scenes look at political figures in stressful moments, for example John F. Kennedy and Hubert Humphrey running for the Democrat Party’s Presidential nomination in *Primary* and Kennedy as President responding to the crisis in Alabama in *Crisis: Behind a Presidential Commitment*. In the latter film, Kennedy’s private moments are sharply juxtaposed with the familiar media image of him as a public

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<sup>92</sup> Paul Arthur, “Jargons of Authenticity (Three American Moments),” in *Theorizing Documentary*, ed. Michael Renov (New York: Routledge, 1993), 122, 121.

<sup>93</sup> Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, 111.

figure, while at the same time taking into account the knowledge gained from other media of the crisis that forms the backdrop for the documentary.

As well as politicians, the direct cinema documentaries also focused on movie stars and popular musicians, such as Jane Fonda in *Jane* (1962), the Beatles in *What's Happening! The Beatles in the USA* (1964), Marlon Brando in *Meet Marlon Brando* (1965), and Bob Dylan in *Don't Look Back* (1966).<sup>94</sup> While there was a well-established media industry in the United States that revolved around the promotion of Hollywood “stars,” the only suggestion that they had private lives came from the occasional hints of scandal in gossip columns and low-brow magazines generally dismissed as ‘scandal sheets.’ In any event, they were seldom portrayed as everyday people. In fact, as Guy Debord has pointed out, the idea of stars as “spectacular representations of living human beings” was one of the cornerstones of Hollywood as an institution.<sup>95</sup> Popular musicians were also increasingly promoted equally as celebrities and, even more than politicians, they had carefully constructed identities as performers. This made them perfect subjects for the direct cinema filmmakers who could structure their documentaries by juxtaposing the pre-existing public persona of the performer with glimpses of the private person that was presumed to exist backstage, behind the mask.

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<sup>94</sup> *Jane* (D. A. Pennebaker, Richard Leacock, Hope Ryden, Gregory Shuker and Abbot Mills, USA, 1962), *What's Happening! The Beatles in the USA* (Albert Maysles and David Maysles, USA, 1964), *Meet Marlon Brando* (Albert Maysles and David Maysles, USA, 1965), *Don't Look Back* (D. A. Pennebaker, USA, 1966).

<sup>95</sup> Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (New York: Zone Books, 1995), 38.

Direct cinema “rockumentaries” such as *What’s Happening! The Beatles in the USA* and *Don’t Look Back* documented tours by contemporary popular musicians. The accent on the new served to highlight the documentaries’ break with tradition and, with television no longer seen as a viable exhibition outlet, it is likely that the popular musical subject matter also helped the filmmakers gain an audience for the films’ theatrical release. Although D. A. Pennebaker appears to identify more with Kennedy than Humphrey in *Primary* and the Drew Associates filmmakers were actually invited to the White House to film the events for *Crisis: Behind a Presidential Commitment*, there appears to be whole new level of identification between Pennebaker and Dylan in *Don’t Look Back*. It suggests a moving away from direct cinema’s original journalistic impulse, towards what Rothman has described as “a collaboration in which filmmaker and subject are co-conspirators.”<sup>96</sup> This trend was to continue unabated in the festival rockumentaries of the late 1960s, for example in *Monterey Pop*, *Woodstock*, and *Gimme Shelter*.

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<sup>96</sup> Rothman, *Documentary Film Classics*, 149.

## Chapter Two

### Rock, Festivals, and the Rockumentaries

#### Direct Cinema and Music

“They were standing on tables, on the floor, jumping around all over the place. And it was freedom. Screw the tripod. Screw the dollies. Screw all that stuff. You could move.”<sup>97</sup>

The above quote is from direct cinema filmmaker Richard Leacock, describing his experiences working as a cameraman on the short documentary *Jazz Dance* (1954).<sup>98</sup> The film is a clear illustration of the effectiveness of direct cinema’s observational techniques in documenting a live musical performance. Leacock’s remarks highlight the physical freedom of being able to use a handheld rather than a mounted camera, thereby enabling the filmmaker to move and in his own words “just shoot and shoot and shoot.”<sup>99</sup> While the film has no synchronized sound, *Jazz Dance* suggests the development of a new aesthetic, with an emphasis on the continual flow of movement onstage, effectively capturing the interplay between the musicians by means of intercutting and close-up shots on the different instruments. It also captures the movement of dancers in the audience and the intercutting between musicians and dancers incorporates the latter in the documented performance. The use of the handheld camera in early films such as *Jazz Dance* therefore set a precedent for the representation of live musical performances in the later direct cinema rockumentaries.

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<sup>97</sup> Richard Leacock interviewed in *Cinema Verite: Defining the Moment* (Peter Wintonick, Canada, 1999).

<sup>98</sup> *Jazz Dance* (Roger Tilton, USA, 1954).

<sup>99</sup> Richard Leacock in *Cinema Verite: Defining the Moment*.

### 1960s Popular Music on Film

The direct cinema rockumentaries documented live rock music events such as tours and festivals, often mixing footage of the live onstage performances with scenes of the musicians backstage. As Keir Keightley has suggested, non-fiction purported to offer “a sense of unmanufacture that resonated with the core values of rock culture.”<sup>100</sup> The films had an aura of “authenticity” that contrasted sharply with the highly artificial rock and pop musicals featuring big-name stars such as Elvis Presley, and even with the (albeit visually fresher) Beatles’ films, such as *A Hard Day’s Night* (1964) and *Help* (1965) that featured the group lip-synching in a series of contrived situations.<sup>101</sup> Furthermore, the live performance footage in the rockumentaries also contrasted sharply with the artificiality of television musical variety shows such as *American Bandstand*,<sup>102</sup> which claimed to showcase the pre-eminent popular musicians of the day live, but instead featured them lip-synching to their latest hits. Even if they were actually live, for example on the *Ed Sullivan Show*,<sup>103</sup> the staged television context inevitably failed to match the sheer immediacy of the rockumentaries’ presentation of live rock performances. In addition, where the nationally networked television music shows usually only featured the more commercially successful acts of the day, the festival rockumentaries such as *Monterey Pop* and *Woodstock* featured others who were relatively unknown, including a number of

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<sup>100</sup> Keir Keightley, “The Music Industry in Anglo-American Film,” in *Movie Music: The Film Reader*, ed. Kay Dickinson (London: Routledge, 2003), 177.

<sup>101</sup> *A Hard Day’s Night* (Richard Lester, UK, 1964), *Help* (Richard Lester, UK, 1965).

<sup>102</sup> *American Bandstand* (ABC television Series, USA, 1953-1989).

<sup>103</sup> *The Ed Sullivan Show* (CBS Television Series, USA, 1948-1971). It was originally called *Toast of the Town*. See [www.imdb.com/title/tt0040053/](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0040053/).

underground acts which were closely associated with the broad social movement that became known as the “counterculture.”<sup>104</sup>

### **The Roots of 1960s Rock Music**

Rock emerged out of 1950s rock’n’roll, a form of music that was largely derived from African-American rhythm and blues. Rock’n’roll was originally regarded as a form of resistance to the commercialism of pop and to the wider commercialism of the dominant consumer culture. Nevertheless, its oppositional stance was quickly appropriated by the music industry. By the early 1960s it had all but disappeared in the United States, in the wake of Elvis Presley’s military service and his subsequent “defection” to Hollywood, the death of Buddy Holly, Chuck Berry’s imprisonment, and the 1959 payola scandal where disc jockey and promoter Alan Freed was convicted of taking bribes for radio play. However, rock’n’roll was a more enduring influence in Britain and it re-appeared there in the early 1960s as a hybrid form of electric music known as rock which was then exported back to the United States through records and tours by so-called “British invasion” groups, such as the Rolling Stones, the Animals, the Yardbirds, the Kinks and Them. These groups in turn influenced American musicians such as Bob Dylan, the Byrds, and the Grateful Dead to move away from playing acoustic folk music to playing electrified rock. Largely for marketing purposes, rock began to be divided into a number of sub-genres, such as folk-rock, blues-rock, hard rock, and acid rock. Acid or

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<sup>104</sup> Daniel A. Foss and Ralph W. Larkin have described the 1960s counterculture as a diverse social formation unified by “intense generational resentment.” See “From *The Gates of Eden* to *Day of the Locust*: An Analysis of Dissident Youth Movement of the 1960s and its Heirs of the Early 1970s - The Post-Movement Groups,” *Theory and Society* 3:1 (1976), 47.

psychedelic rock was derived from folk and blues but it mutated under the influence of LSD and the extra power and volume of electric instruments.<sup>105</sup> Its most notable exponents were San Francisco groups such as the Grateful Dead, the Jefferson Airplane and the Quicksilver Messenger Service. While acid rock was also played by British groups such as Pink Floyd and even the Beatles and the Rolling Stones played LSD-influenced songs, the San Francisco groups were unusual in seeing themselves as part of a wider countercultural community of artists, often playing concerts and festivals for free.<sup>106</sup>

As Edward Morgan has suggested, rock quickly became “the common language of the young,”<sup>107</sup> yet by the late 1960s its countercultural image appeared more as a reflection of the need for product differentiation in an increasingly segmented popular musical marketplace. In that respect, the underground had become “above-ground,” and artists identified with the counterculture, such as the Doors and the Rolling Stones, were selling large numbers of records, reflecting the shift that had occurred over the second half of the 1960s. Even the original acid-rock groups the Grateful Dead and the Jefferson Airplane were now on major labels, Warner Brothers and RCA respectively.<sup>108</sup> Late 1960s rock was marketed as a more “serious” form of popular music, intended more for listening rather than dancing. Often featuring extended improvisations influenced by free jazz, it

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<sup>105</sup> Martin A. Lee and Bruce Schlain, *Acid Dreams: The Complete Social History of LSD, the CIA, the Sixties, and Beyond* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1985), 144.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> Edward P. Morgan, *The 60s Experience: Hard Lessons about Modern America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 188.

<sup>108</sup> Dave Allen, “A Public Transition: Acoustic and Electric Performances at the Woodstock Festival,” in *Remembering Woodstock*, ed. Andy Bennett (Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), 120.

was also lauded as a more experimental form, therefore contributing to the development of new taste hierarchies. For the first time, rock music was also regarded as a cultural practice worthy of study, leading to the emergence of dedicated rock magazines (such as *Rolling Stone* and *Crawdaddy*)<sup>109</sup> and specialist rock writers. At the same time, rock instrumentalists, particularly guitarists such as Jimi Hendrix, Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck and Jerry Garcia were widely celebrated for their musicianship, in a similar fashion to jazz or classical performers.

Rock also made claims to being a more “authentic” form of popular music, with much of its borrowed authenticity coming from its roots in black American music which, as Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin have noted, was regarded as being more “emotionally honest.”<sup>110</sup> 1960s blues-rock, for example, drew on the roots of the blues as a form of African-American music that expressed suffering and social alienation, while in the process removing it from its original collective cultural context. However, the late 1960s rock equivalent focused mainly on the social alienation of the individual, being more concerned with expressing the subjective impulses that were a feature of the counterculture.<sup>111</sup> That individualism was also reflected in the way celebrity musicians such as Bob Dylan and Jim Morrison of the Doors were portrayed in the media. Above all, they were celebrated for the individualistic nature of their performances, reflecting

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<sup>109</sup> See Kembrew McLeod, “1/2 A Critique of Rock Criticism in North America,” *Popular Music* 20 (2001), 47-60.

<sup>110</sup> Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 160.

<sup>111</sup> Morgan, *The 60s Experience*, 188.

the persistence of the romantic view of the artist promoted by the 1950s “Beat” writers and poets such as Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg.

The second half of the 1960s also witnessed widespread changes in the consumption of popular music. Pop was traditionally based around the single track and the 7 inch/ 45 rpm record and mid 1960s rock was similarly based around the single. However, from around 1967 the multi-track LP (since the early 1950s more associated with jazz and classical music) increasingly became rock’s preferred release format. Pop music was largely dependent on radio as a promotional tool and consequently as a means of achieving commercial success, but the emergence of longer rock songs (beginning with Dylan’s “Like a Rolling Stone” and the Rolling Stones’ “Goin’ Home”) and the popularization of the LP led to a reduction in the influence of the radio DJ and Top 40 radio formats.

Where mid-1960s pop and rock songs were limited to three minutes duration for maximum radio-play, in the late 1960s it was not unusual for live versions of songs by underground rock groups such as the Doors, Cream, Traffic, Steppenwolf, the Jefferson Airplane and the Grateful Dead to be ten or even fifteen minutes in length. This tendency towards longer songs and the consequent reduction in the promotional power of AM radio contributed to a renewed emphasis on the live performance, something which was undoubtedly a factor in the emergence of rock festivals such as Monterey and Woodstock and also in their representation on film in the festival rockumentaries.

***What's Happening! The Beatles in the USA and Don't Look Back***

Whereas *Jazz Dance* was a short film, both *What's Happening! The Beatles in the USA* (1964) and *Don't Look Back* (1966)<sup>112</sup> were feature length documentaries, the former made for television and the latter for theatrical release. The films are regarded as two of the first rockumentaries, documenting rock and pop musicians and musical events using the observational techniques associated with direct cinema.<sup>113</sup> The Maysles brothers' *What's Happening! The Beatles in the USA* is a document of the first American tour by the hugely successful British pop group the Beatles. To some extent it functions as news, in the manner of earlier direct cinema documentaries such as *Primary* (1960), *Crisis: Behind a Presidential Commitment* (1963), or *The Chair* (1963), with the Beatles and their largely youth audience represented as a new cultural phenomenon. Yet, as with *Don't Look Back* and also the later festival rockumentaries, it avoids the "crisis structure" of the earlier films and excludes voiceover narration entirely, instead providing what is essentially a "diary" of the Beatles tour.<sup>114</sup> As with the later festival rockumentaries, the audience is also a subject of the film and shots of the group are repeatedly intercut with footage of screaming, seemingly hysterical fans. In a continuation of the trend established in earlier direct cinema documentaries such as *Jane* (1962) or *Meet Marlon Brando* (1965),<sup>115</sup> *What's Happening! The Beatles in the USA* also contains footage of its

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<sup>112</sup> *What's Happening! The Beatles in the USA* (Albert Maysles and David Maysles, USA, 1964). *Don't Look Back* (D. A. Pennebaker, USA, 1966).

<sup>113</sup> An earlier music documentary, *Lonely Boy* (Wolf Koenig and Ralph Kroitor, Canada, 1962), focused on the Canadian pop singer and "teen idol" Paul Anka.

<sup>114</sup> Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell, *Film History: An Introduction* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2003), 484-485.

<sup>115</sup> *Jane* (D. A. Pennebaker, Richard Leacock, Hope Ryden, Gregory Shuker and Abbot Mills, USA, 1962), *Meet Marlon Brando* (Albert Maysles and David Maysles, USA, 1965).

celebrity subjects “backstage,” in hotel rooms and limousines, thereby promising the cinematic spectator access to the “real” Beatles behind the media hype.

The backstage was to become an even more significant component in D. A. Pennebaker’s *Don’t Look Back* which documents the 1965 British tour by the influential American folk singer Bob Dylan, portraying him both onstage and backstage in a characteristic direct cinema juxtaposition of the public and private. In one respect, the film continues direct cinema’s preoccupation with the realm of celebrity. Yet, in another respect, it also presents Dylan, and in fact appears to identify with him, as a spokesperson for the wider 1960s counterculture. In doing so, *Don’t Look Back* emphasizes direct cinema’s break with the pre-World War II documentary forms that often functioned to uphold the state and its institutions. At the same time, *Don’t Look Back* departs from early direct cinema methods in its deployment of staged scenes and non-diegetic soundtrack music. This is most evident in the film’s prologue, which has been described as the first music video, and in which Dylan holds up a series of cue cards to the sound of a studio recording of his latest single “Subterranean Homesick Blues.” However, *Don’t Look Back* represents an even greater departure from early direct cinema in the closeness of the filmmaker’s identification with the performer, something that was also a feature of the subsequent festival rockumentaries.

### **Festivals and Festival Documentaries**

Whereas *What’s Happening! The Beatles in the USA* and *Don’t Look Back* documented tours by single acts, the late 1960s rockumentaries *Monterey Pop* (1968), *Woodstock*, and

*Gimme Shelter* (both 1970)<sup>116</sup> focused on the multi-act rock festivals that were emerging as significant events in contemporary American youth culture. Outdoor festivals of music and dance actually dated back to the early years of the twentieth century,<sup>117</sup> but the more direct precursors of the 1960s rock festivals were the Newport Jazz and Folk Festivals that began in 1954 and 1959 respectively. The Newport festivals were documented on film in *Jazz on a Summer's Day* (1960) and *Festival* (1967).<sup>118</sup> Both films set a precedent for the later rockumentaries by focusing not just on the performances but on the entire event, including numerous shots of the audience and interviews with audience members. Their broad focus on the whole context of the event, including both performers and audience, would be used in a similar way in the rockumentaries to express the role of music and the music festivals in galvanizing the 1960s counterculture. At the same time, while the Newport films envisaged a community comprised largely of jazz and folk aficionados, the festival rockumentaries would group performers and audience together as representatives of a much larger youth subculture, one largely defined by age.

Along with the Newport Jazz and Folk festivals, another precursor of the late-1960s rock festivals was the weeklong series of concerts produced by New York DJ Murray the K in

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<sup>116</sup> *Monterey Pop* (D. A. Pennebaker, USA, 1968), *Woodstock* (Michael Wadleigh, USA, 1970), *Gimme Shelter* (Albert Maysles, David Maysles and Charlotte Zwerin, USA, 1970).

<sup>117</sup> Dave Liang, "The Three Woodstocks and the Live Music Scene," in *Remembering Woodstock*, ed. Andy Bennett (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), 4-5.

<sup>118</sup> *Jazz on a Summers Day* (Aram Avakian and Bert Stern, USA, 1960), *Festival* (Murray Lerner, USA, 1967).

1967.<sup>119</sup> The New York shows were unusual in featuring multiple acts over several days, in contrast to the majority of rock events at the time, which tended to be single evening live performances with no more than three acts. The shows were also notable for their musical diversity and, unusually for the time, their inclusion of both white and black performers, including Wilson Pickett, the Blues Project, Phil Ochs, the Miracles, Simon and Garfunkel, Cream, and the Who. Nevertheless, such a diversity only reflected the sounds already heard on some of the newly emergent FM radio stations at the time. Typically, these stations featured album tracks from a mixture of British invasion rock groups, Motown, American folk-rock and pop, Stax and Atlantic “soul” artists, and easy listening tunes by the likes of Sergio Mendez and Brazil ‘66. Such playlists were also reflected in the similarly eclectic line-up that was a feature of the Monterey Pop Festival that took place only a few months later in June 1967.

### **The Happenings**

The rock festivals documented in the rockumentaries also had their roots in the music “happenings” that were held from 1965 onwards, most notably in the Haight-Ashbury area of San Francisco, but also in other parts of the United States as well as in Britain. The countercultural possibilities of the happening were first demonstrated in the psychedelic dances organized by The Family Dog collective and from 1966 in the Trips Festivals that featured music, theatre, and dancing over a period of two or three days. Martin Lee and Bruce Schlain have described such events as “mass environmental theatre” with light shows and stage projections illuminating both the bands and the

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<sup>119</sup> Richie Unterberger, *Eight Miles High: Folk-Rock’s Flight from Haight-Ashbury to Woodstock* (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2003). 271.

audience, many of whom were stoned on marijuana and LSD.<sup>120</sup> Another precursor of the 1960s rock festivals was the Human Be-Ins, free festivals held in public locations such as Golden Gate Park in San Francisco and Central Park in New York from January 1967. The events featured music, theatre, and poetry readings, as well as speeches by counterculture figures such as ex-Harvard professor and pro-LSD crusader Timothy Leary who advised the San Francisco crowd to “Turn on, tune in, drop out.”<sup>121</sup> As such, the countercultural happenings carried the germ of a much wider social change in their open promotion of alternative lifestyles and mind-expanding drugs and in their rejection of consumerism and materialism. Furthermore, they were also much less physically contained than the later rock festivals, taking place both indoors and outdoors within the city boundaries, in the process highlighting issues of public and private space and openly contradicting the prevailing values of mainstream American society.

In fact, San Francisco’s Golden Gate Park was the original choice for the free concert that concluded the Rolling Stones’ 1969 American tour, but when the organizers were denied a permit by the city authorities the concert was shifted, first to the Sears Point Raceway and then eventually to the Altamont Speedway.<sup>122</sup> The rejection of commercialism that was symbolized by the free festivals persisted in the popular imagination and manifested itself at Woodstock, which in effect became a free festival after concertgoers broke down the original perimeter fence. Yet, apart from a small amount of surviving footage filmed

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<sup>120</sup> Lee and Schlain, *Acid Dreams*, 143.

<sup>121</sup> Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope: Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1987), 210.

<sup>122</sup> Thomas M. Kitts, “Documenting, Creating, and Interpreting Moments of Definition: Monterey Pop, Woodstock and Gimme Shelter,” *The Journal of Popular Culture* 43, no.4 (2009): 720.

by people in the audience, there is little remaining documentation of these earlier events, suggesting that it was not until the rock festivals were packaged and commodified in the form of the rockumentaries that they began to be recognized. Nevertheless, the Monterey Pop Festival still had its roots in the music happenings, particularly in its non-profit structure, with profits from the event being donated to musical and educational charities.<sup>123</sup> The festival line-up also included the pre-eminent San Francisco acid rock groups; the Grateful Dead, the Jefferson Airplane, Country Joe and the Fish and the Quicksilver Messenger Service, all of which were frequent performers at the Trips Festivals and at the Human Be-In. As documented in D. A. Pennebaker's *Monterey Pop*, the festival also bore a resemblance to the earlier happenings in its presentation of the live musical performances as part of a total sensory environment in which spectacular light shows and stage projections augmented the music.

### ***Monterey Pop***

*Monterey Pop*, originally produced both for television and theatrical release, documents the Monterey International Pop Festival that took place in Monterey, Northern California, in June 1967. Compared to later festivals such as Woodstock, Monterey was a relatively small-scale local event, with an audience of approximately fifty thousand people and what Thomas Kitts has referred to as an “uncorporate approach,”<sup>124</sup> best illustrated by the film's footage of the stage being erected by a group of what appear to be volunteers rather than the professional roadies of the later, larger festivals. The Monterey festival was organized by a group of Los Angeles businessmen, including music producer and

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<sup>123</sup> Morgan, *The 60s Experience*, 192.

<sup>124</sup> Kitts, “Documenting, Creating, and Interpreting Moments of Definition,” 717.

promoter Lou Adler and John Phillips of The Mamas and the Papas.<sup>125</sup> Despite its small scale, the event had an influence far beyond the immediate festival audience, largely because of D. A. Pennebaker's documentary.<sup>126</sup> Together, the festival and the film revealed the commercial potential of the new rock music, with a number of the acts subsequently signed to major record labels and, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, several rising to international superstardom.<sup>127</sup> They also revealed the profit making potential of the festival format, thereby contributing to a subsequent proliferation of rock festivals, not only throughout the United States, but also in Britain. At the time, *Rolling Stone* magazine suggested that the festival and the film had unleashed "a commercial boom," with approximately twenty-five million young people attending about thirty festivals in the US between June 1967 and July 1970 and a further thirty planned after Woodstock but not eventuating.<sup>128</sup>

Whereas earlier direct cinema documentaries (and *Don't Look Back*) had focused on individual subjects, *Monterey Pop* documented live musical performances by multiple acts. In contrast to the nationally-networked television music shows, the film includes several lesser-known American bands, such as Moby Grape, Country Joe and the Fish and Big Brother and the Holding Company, alongside popular chart acts such as The Mamas and the Papas, the Association, and Simon and Garfunkel. It also features the American debuts by the Jimi Hendrix Experience and the South African trumpet player

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<sup>125</sup> Dominic Priore, *Riot on Sunset Strip: Rock'n'Roll's Last Stand in Hollywood* (London: Jawbone Press, 2007), 18-19.

<sup>126</sup> Lee and Schlain, *Acid Dreams*, 178.

<sup>127</sup> Morgan, *The 60s Experience*, 192.

<sup>128</sup> Liang, "The Three Woodstocks and the Live Music Scene," 6.

Hugh Masekela, as well as the Indian sitar player Ravi Shankar and his group. In addition to documenting the onstage performances, *Monterey Pop* also focuses on the festival audience, implying their solidarity with the performers within a wider countercultural community, one that even transcends national borders. As with *Don't Look Back*, the film departs from original direct cinema theory and practice in the extent of the filmmaker's identification with the subject matter and the documented footage has been edited in order to present the counterculture at its most utopian. In this respect, it moves from observation to advocacy, in the process presenting the festival as, in George Plasketes' words, "a lyrical saga of utopian dreams and everyone feelin' groovy."<sup>129</sup> In the end, *Monterey Pop* represents the Monterey International Pop Festival as a manifestation of the so-called "Summer of Love," portraying a continual flow of sounds and images that suggests a diverse, always welcoming, and above all idealistic, counterculture.

### ***Woodstock***

The film *Woodstock* documents the Woodstock Music and Arts Fair that took place near Bethel, New York (rather than the actual town of Woodstock) in August 1969. It is subtitled "Three Days of Peace and Music" and as such has been carefully constructed to preserve a sense of the idealism of *Monterey Pop*, even as the latter's Summer of Love vision had become distinctly frayed in a political climate that included divisions within the counterculture, violent confrontations on American streets and especially the long-running Vietnam War. For its part, *Woodstock* attempts to provide a broad overview of a

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<sup>129</sup> George M. Plasketes, "Rock on Reel: The Rise and Fall of Rock Culture in America Reflected in a Decade of Rockumentaries," *Qualitative Sociology* 12(1), 1989, 60.

large-scale mass-culture event that was remarkable for its sheer size and sprawling extent, with the festival audience numbering approximately four hundred thousand and barely contained within the festival site. In contrast to the comparatively low-budget *Monterey Pop*, the documented footage was edited using Warner Brothers facilities and financial backing.”<sup>130</sup> Perhaps as a result, the filmmaker was able to make extensive use of post-production effects, such as superimposed cinematography and multiple split screens, the latter effectively providing, as Kitts has suggested, “a visual clue that Woodstock was not a convergent set of happenings.”<sup>131</sup> As with *Monterey Pop*, the film only includes a selection of the documented live performances and there are some notable omissions, such as the Grateful Dead, Creedence Clearwater Revival, and the Band, all of which for different reasons declined to be filmed.<sup>132</sup> Along with its extensive use of post-production effects, *Woodstock* departs from original direct cinema philosophies and methods in its widespread use of interviews conducted by the filmmakers themselves with organizers, festival workers, people from the nearby town and members of the audience. In addition, the interviewees’ responses to questions (at times excerpted) are often compiled and edited as a series of one-liners, appearing more as a summary of audience opinion, consistent with the film’s portrayal of the festival audience as a mass, but also in a way reminiscent of pre-World War II documentary forms. However, while the film’s main focus is on the live musical performances, the privileged backstage access

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<sup>130</sup> Pete Fornatale, *Back to the Garden: The Story of Woodstock and How it Changed a Generation* (New York: Touchstone Books, 2009), 277-280.

<sup>131</sup> Kitts, “Documenting, Creating, and Interpreting Moments of Definition,” 718.

<sup>132</sup> Kitts (718) has argued that the Band and the Grateful Dead both refused to be filmed because of what they saw as “blatant commercialism.” Fornatale (158) has suggested that Creedence Clearwater Revival declined to be filmed because of the poor quality sound during their performance.

to the performers that was so much a feature of earlier direct cinema documentaries and rockumentaries such as *Don't Look Back* is largely absent. *Woodstock* also departs from early direct cinema in its employment of studio recordings of soundtrack songs to help establish an idealistic mood early in the film and to return to that sense of idealism over the closing credits. Furthermore, *Woodstock* features higher fidelity sound recording than any other rockumentary, thereby highlighting the problem faced by the earlier direct cinema filmmakers when recording live musical performances on equipment designed for mobility rather than sound quality. Nevertheless, the subsequent chart success of the film's soundtrack album served to emphasize the importance of the music, not only as part of the merchandising, but also in terms of cinema's ability to draw a music audience who by this time were well accustomed to stereophonic sound.

*Woodstock*, the festival and the documentary, have both been regarded as galvanizing a counterculture. This is most likely due to the sheer size of the festival audience and the fact that, with Warner Brothers backing, the film had far wider distribution, enabling it to reach a much larger audience than any previous direct cinema documentary or any other rockumentary. It is also worth remembering that the late 1960s rock festivals were one of the few locations where the counterculture could experience itself outside the confines of contemporary mainstream society. They occupied public space and at the same time provided a place where the counterculture was no longer defined in relation to the dominant culture. In this respect, the festivals provided a context in which it became possible to imagine a very different social order. In many ways, *Woodstock* manages to preserve a sense of that optimism, although it does so through the exclusion of footage

that might portray the festival in a more negative light, such as the widely reported incident when Pete Townsend of the Who assaulted Yippie co-leader Abbie Hoffman when the latter attempted to address the crowd during the group's performance.<sup>133</sup> That discursive shaping of the documentary footage is most clearly evident in the filmmaker's imposition of a form of narrative closure, featuring a montage of replayed shots of the festival audience at its most spectacular followed by shots of pre-festival green fields, accompanied by Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young's self-referential "Woodstock" on the soundtrack.<sup>134</sup>

### ***Gimme Shelter***

*Gimme Shelter* began as a document of the Rolling Stones' 1969 American tour, but instead ended up focusing more on events that occurred in the audience during the tour's final show, a free concert at the Altamont Speedway just outside San Francisco. During the concert an audience member by the name of Meredith Hunter was killed by a member of the Hell's Angels motorcycle club that had been hired to provide security for the band. The film departs from direct cinema theory and practice in its re-framing of the Altamont concert through shots of Rolling Stones' members watching footage of the show in the Maysles Brothers' editing suite. From the very beginning of the film the camera focuses largely on the Stones' lead singer Mick Jagger, juxtaposing his onstage persona in the live onstage footage from earlier in the tour with its observation of him backstage in the editing suite scenes. Through multiple replays of footage of Meredith Hunter's murder, *Gimme Shelter* sets up what amounts to a proxy interview situation. The replays of the

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<sup>133</sup> Lee and Schlain, *Acid Dreams*, 253.

<sup>134</sup> Kitts, "Documenting, Creating, and Interpreting Moments of Definition," 720.

murder footage, while the camera focuses on Jagger's reaction, insinuate an element of indictment into the interview situation and in doing so they recall the original desire of Robert Drew and other direct cinema practitioners to create a new kind of audiovisual journalism.<sup>135</sup> At the same time, the increased onscreen presence of the filmmakers (compared to earlier direct cinema documentaries) is to some extent reminiscent of the use of the camera as a tool of provocation in the cinéma vérité documentary *Chronicle of a Summer*. This reflects the fact that, while the cinéma vérité approach had previously been rejected by the first wave of direct cinema practitioners, by the end of the 1960s there was less of a boundary between the two movements. Nevertheless, *Gimme Shelter's* second editing suite scene also suggests something of a return to original direct cinema principles and methodologies in its focus on Jagger as an individual subject, in marked contrast to the compiled overviews of both *Monterey Pop* and *Woodstock*.

Whereas *Monterey Pop* and *Woodstock* were largely idealistic and utopian in tone, the prevailing mood of *Gimme Shelter* is one of cynicism and disillusionment. The diverse, idealistic and inclusive counterculture portrayed in the earlier festival rockumentaries has disappeared and been replaced by one characterized by fear, suspicion, and dislocation. While *Woodstock* expressed some dystopian elements, they are depicted as arising from events external to the counterculture, such as the war in Vietnam. By contrast, the dystopian elements in *Gimme Shelter* are represented as coming from within the counterculture itself. From the very first mention of the Altamont location, the shots are portentous, with mysterious structures emerging in the moonlight and shadowy forms

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<sup>135</sup> Thompson and Bordwell, *Film History: An Introduction*, 483-485.

moving like zombies and huddled around fires as if participating in some arcane ritual of the carnivalesque. In addition, *Gimme Shelter* both looks and feels darker than any previous rockumentary. Indeed, much of the concert at the Altamont Speedway has been filmed in semi-darkness, with handheld camera footage of seemingly random outbreaks of violence and glimpses of anxious faces in the audience contributing to the ever-present sense of unease. The suggestion is that the documented footage has been shaped by the filmmakers to resemble what Plasketes has called “a filmic nightmare,”<sup>136</sup> an impression reinforced by the Rolling Stones’ apocalyptic title song that proclaims “Rape, murder! It’s just a shot away.” Furthermore, to a greater extent than any other direct cinema documentary or any other rockumentary, the film goes beyond merely observing, and attempts an after-the-fact analysis of its own footage of the concert, though without offering any definitive conclusions. In the end, rather than simply being a document of a Rolling Stones concert, *Gimme Shelter* invests the events at Altamont with a far wider significance, thereby contributing to the belief that they symbolized the final demise of the once-prevalent idealism of the 1960s American counterculture.

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<sup>136</sup> Plasketes, “Rock on Reel,” 63.

## Chapter Three

### The Rockumentaries and Direct Cinema

*Monterey Pop* (1968), *Woodstock* (1970), and *Gimme Shelter* (1970)<sup>137</sup> document the late 1960s rock festivals and, in doing so, they bring to the fore a number of issues, not only within direct cinema, but also within the documentary form in general. As mentioned in chapter three, the festival rockumentaries depart from early direct cinema theory and practice in a number of ways. As is perhaps inevitable in documenting such large-scale mass-culture events, *Monterey Pop* and *Woodstock* employ a largely macro-political focus that appears in sharp contrast to direct cinema's original micro-political focus on individual subjects. As mentioned in chapter two, *Monterey Pop* and *Woodstock* depart from original direct cinema theory and practice in using interviews conducted by the filmmakers and also in their employment of non-diegetic soundtrack music for persuasive effect. In addition, *Gimme Shelter*'s editing suite scenes recall the use of the camera as catalyst in cinéma vérité, a method and philosophy previously rejected by the original direct cinema practitioners. Most significantly, the festival rockumentaries take the concept of the backstage, one of the chief tropes of direct cinema, and expand it to trace a shifting relationship between onstage, backstage and audience, in the process introducing another in-between region, the offstage. While the audience is still a subject of all the rockumentaries, much of the focus in both *Monterey Pop* and *Woodstock* is on the onstage, in the process raising questions of "authenticity" in performance. At the same

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<sup>137</sup> *Monterey Pop* (D. A. Pennebaker, USA, 1968), *Woodstock* (Michael Wadleigh, USA, 1970), *Gimme Shelter* (Albert Maysles, David Maysles and Charlotte Zwerin, USA, 1970).

time, the expectation of backstage access from the earlier rockumentaries only remains as a structuring absence. Nevertheless, the backstage does return in the editing suite scenes of *Gimme Shelter*, thereby inviting a comparison between Mick Jagger's onstage persona and the film's observation of him backstage when confronted by replayed footage of Meredith Hunter's murder.

The festival rockumentaries also trace another shifting relationship, that between filmmaker, performer, festival audience, and cinematic spectator. In *Monterey Pop* and *Woodstock* the cinematic spectator is identified with the diverse and welcoming festival audiences. By contrast, in the early Rolling Stones' tour concert scenes of *Gimme Shelter* the spectator is allowed to move between identification with the concert audience and one with the onstage performers. However, in the film's subsequent editing suite scenes the spectator is distanced firstly from the Altamont audience and then from the onstage performers as the camera becomes more an instrument of alienation for the Rolling Stones and especially their singer Jagger. In one respect, *Gimme Shelter's* editing suite scenes represent a departure both from direct cinema and also from the earlier rockumentaries, but in another respect they also represent a return to direct cinema's original focus on individual subjects and a return to a micro-political rather than macro-political focus. Yet, *Monterey Pop*, *Woodstock*, and *Gimme Shelter* also differ from earlier direct cinema documentaries in the extent of the filmmaker's identification with the films' subject matter and in many ways they return to pre-World War II concepts of the documentary form as a mode of persuasion, with the documented footage discursively

shaped in the editing room in order to present the Monterey and Woodstock festivals at their most utopian and Altamont at its most dystopian.

### **The Backstage**

The early rockumentaries continued direct cinema's preoccupation with the realm of celebrity. Jeanne Hall observes how *Don't Look Back* (1966) tracks Bob Dylan "just as Al Maysles tracked John F. Kennedy in *Primary* (1960),"<sup>138</sup> not only portraying him onstage, but also in private moments behind the scenes.<sup>139</sup> In direct cinema the focus on celebrity revolves around spectator access to the "backstage," a term also employed more generally by the sociologist Erving Goffman in his 1959 book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* to describe "a place relative to a given performance where the impression fostered by that performance is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course."<sup>140</sup> The convergence between the way the term is used by Goffman and the representation of backstage space in the rockumentaries reflects an era when celebrity and stardom were becoming increasingly integral to the process of identity formation. Both *What's Happening! The Beatles in the USA* (1964) and *Don't Look Back* juxtaposed their celebrity subjects' already well-known public personae with their observed backstage identities, the implication being that the backstage was a place where, in Jonathan

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<sup>138</sup> *Don't Look Back* (D. A. Pennebaker, USA, 1966), *Primary* (Robert Drew, USA, 1960), *What's Happening! The Beatles in the USA* (Albert Maysles and David Maysles, USA, 1964).

<sup>139</sup> Jeanne Hall, "Realism as a Style in Cinéma Vérité: A Critical Analysis of Primary," *Cinema Journal* 30, no.4 (Summer, 1991), 45.

<sup>140</sup> Erving Goffman. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1959), 112.

Romney's words, the viewer might see "the artist revealing his or her true self."<sup>141</sup> Yet, as Goffman points out, "everyday life" itself is constituted through a series of performances that replicate a similar dichotomy. The rockumentaries may allow the spectator backstage access to their celebrity subjects but there is little suggestion that those subjects will reveal their "true" selves. In the eye of the filmmaker's camera the backstage becomes, in Goffman's words, just another performance "region."<sup>142</sup> Backstage footage can only be shot with the agreement of the subject and, even more than politicians, popular musicians are often active and media savvy practitioners in the process of identity construction, striving for control of the production of their public persona. As a result, there is a structuring tension that runs throughout the rockumentaries between the filmmakers and the performers who co-operate but also compete in the identity construction process.

The extent of the backstage footage in *Don't Look Back* at least suggests the possibility of the spontaneous, unscripted moment that represented the ultimate reward for the direct cinema filmmakers. However, *Monterey Pop* and *Woodstock* are much less radical than the earlier film. Both festival rockumentaries depart from the original direct cinema focus on individual subjects, with the backstage replaced by the offstage, an in-between region where the performers can be seen (but not heard) in the company of other performers and industry "insiders." The inaudibility of the offstage reinforces the performers' privileged status and, in *Woodstock* especially, their separation from the festival audience. In this

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<sup>141</sup> Jonathan Romney, "Access All Areas: the Real Space of the Rock Documentary," in *Celluloid Jukebox: Popular Music and the Movies Since the 1950s*, eds. Jonathan Romney and Adrian Wilson (London: BFI Publishing, 1995), 83, 86.

<sup>142</sup> Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 106.

instance the filmmaker's camera becomes more like a paparazzi camera, catching glimpses of scenes and interactions that it is not a part of, and to which it has not been invited. Nevertheless, the movement in *Monterey Pop* and *Woodstock* away from the trope of the backstage also represents a movement away from the micro-political focus and the juxtaposition of the public and private that was so much a feature of earlier direct cinema documentaries and earlier rockumentaries such as *Don't Look Back*.

Like the backstage, the offstage in the rockumentaries is juxtaposed with the onstage, typically the only space in which audiences encounter the performers. In the early scenes of *Monterey Pop* we are introduced to the musicians in offstage mode. We observe John Phillips of The Mamas and the Papas in his other role as co-organizer of the event and various other festival performers in a relaxed mood in the nearly empty stadium. The air is one of informality, the celebrity musicians briefly portrayed as everyday people, joking with each other and relaxing on the grass field, a space typically reserved for the festival audience. As such, this offstage scene represents an early example of the connection that the film progressively establishes between performers and audience, the musicians becoming an audience for other musicians as they sound-check. The connection is further emphasized later in *Monterey Pop*, in several shots that show performers such as Jimi Hendrix and Mama Cass Elliot sitting in the audience at the front of the stage and looking much the same as any other festivalgoer. In these scenes, the performers are portrayed as having a unique mobility, as both a part of and apart from, the festival audience. Yet, without any real backstage region where the spectator might observe them behind the scenes they are simply presented as celebrities, as with the shots of Rolling Stones'

member Brian Jones who apparently just happens to be walking by at the same time as Eric Burdon and the Animals perform the Stones' song "Paint it Black." In *Monterey Pop* the performers can become part of the audience but there is still a clearly defined boundary between the onstage and offstage, and while the performers may become audience members there is no reciprocal suggestion that audience members can become performers.

By contrast, in *Woodstock* we never see the performers as part of the festival audience. Instead the film highlights a near total separation between the two roles.<sup>143</sup> At the same time, the shifting relationship between the onstage, the backstage and the audience continues. As in *Monterey Pop*, the backstage in *Woodstock* is largely replaced by the offstage, a public space to the side and back of the stage reserved for musicians, groupies, organizers and music industry and media people, as well as the filmmakers themselves. It becomes a party space that is largely ignored by the camera, unlike the backstage of earlier direct cinema documentaries such as *Primary* or of *Don't Look Back*. While in *Primary* there is the promise of seeing another side of Kennedy behind the celebrity mask and backstage footage in the film appears to show him nervously waiting for the election results, in *Woodstock* there is little sense that we might see the performers (to use Goffman's words) in "contradiction"<sup>144</sup> of their onstage persona. Early in the film there is a shot of Jerry Garcia of the Grateful Dead holding up a marijuana cigarette to the camera and later in the director's cut of the film he comments on the size of the audience, but in

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<sup>143</sup> Simon Frith, *Sound Effects: Youth, Leisure and the Politics of Rock'n'Roll* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), 6.

<sup>144</sup> Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 112.

both cases the camera only lingers very briefly. For the most part in *Woodstock*, the musicians are only portrayed onstage in live performance, while the expectation of spectator access to the backstage created by earlier rockumentaries such as *Don't Look Back* only remains as a structuring absence. In addition, the fact that *Woodstock* moves away from the depiction of the backstage and consequently away from any setting where the performers may be portrayed as everyday people also indicates a distinct shift away from direct cinema's original democratizing impulse.

*Gimme Shelter* returns to an overall juxtaposition of the onstage and the backstage and the public and private that is closer to earlier rockumentaries that focused on a single act, such as *What's Happening! The Beatles in the USA* and *Don't Look Back*. *Gimme Shelter* juxtaposes scenes of the Rolling Stones onstage during earlier concerts on their 1969 American tour with scenes of them backstage watching replays in the filmmakers' editing suite of footage from their end-of-tour concert at the Altamont Speedway. In the live performance scenes the Rolling Stones' lead singer Mick Jagger is framed centre-stage, flamboyantly dressed in long flowing scarves and a stars and stripes top hat and very much the focal point of all the film's concert footage. Such footage serves to emphasize his command over the performances, moving back and forth across the stage, with shots taken from the stage positioning the concert audience as a passive and adoring mass below. At the same time, camera positioning allows the cinematic spectator to move from a viewing position that identifies with the concert audience to one with the onstage performer. However, this alternating identification is complicated in the remediated environment of *Gimme Shelter's* backstage scenes. Onstage, Jagger appears fully in

control of his projected persona, but watching his own image in the Maysles brothers' editing suite he appears much less self-assured. There are shifting structures of identification, with the cinematic spectator no longer identified with the audience and the performers but instead identified with the filmmaker's camera, positioned watching the Rolling Stones' lead singer confronted by replayed footage of a murder. The editing suite represents the filmmaker's equivalent of the backstage, a behind the scenes space where films are constructed, and for the musicians it is unfamiliar territory. In the second editing suite scene, the camera singles out Jagger from the other Rolling Stones, thereby returning to a focus on individual subject and on the micro-political, something that appears far better suited to direct cinema methodologies. The multiple replays of footage of Meredith Hunter's murder place Jagger in a situation where he is expected to respond while at the same time the camera focuses on his reaction. As a result, the backstage scene elicits a brief glimpse behind the celebrity mask and of a very different Jagger from the rock star we see onstage earlier in the film. The backstage in *Gimme Shelter* is therefore the site of conflict between the filmmakers and their celebrity subjects for control of the image that is being portrayed. Perhaps as a result of such scenes, later rockumentaries such as *The Last Waltz* (1978) and *The Song Remains the Same* (1976)<sup>145</sup> reduced the backstage to something more akin to the offstage in *Monterey Pop* and *Woodstock*, with token scenes of musicians tuning up in the company of other musicians, thereby simply reinforcing the pre-existing hierarchies of the 1970s rock performance.

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<sup>145</sup> *The Last Waltz* (Martin Scorsese, USA, 1978), *The Song Remains the Same* (Peter Clifton and Joe Massot, UK, 1976).

### **The Rockumentaries and Performance**

One of the most notable ways in which the rockumentaries depart from earlier direct cinema documentaries is in the extent of their focus on live musical performance. In the process they highlight issues of performance both within direct cinema and within the documentary form in general. They foreground what Keith Beattie has described as “the performative self,” a subject who is always conscious “that he or she is on display.”<sup>146</sup> While appeals to authenticity are fraught, the focus on performance inevitably links questions about the “the authenticity of the self”<sup>147</sup> with judgments made as to the consistency or inconsistency of a performer’s motivations. Beattie’s analysis brings to mind the preoccupations of the existentialists who championed literature and theatre that sought to reveal “the inner genuine self, behind the masks and disguises.”<sup>148</sup> In this respect, existentialism provided a major discursive backdrop for both cinéma vérité and direct cinema in the 1950s and 1960s and in the case of the former had a direct impact on its conceptualization of subjectivity.

In reference to authenticity, Goffman makes the useful distinction between a performer who believes in the part he or she is playing and one who is “cynical” about it.<sup>149</sup> The rockumentaries follow a script that outlines the role of the rock performer within the context of the 1960s counterculture and in doing so they appeal to certain criteria of authenticity. One of those criteria is the appearance of total immersion by a performer in

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<sup>146</sup> Keith Beattie, *Documentary Display: Reviewing Nonfiction Film and Video* (London: Wallflower Press, 2008), 69.

<sup>147</sup> Beattie, 61.

<sup>148</sup> Jacob Golomb, *In Search of Authenticity: From Kierkegaard to Camus* (London: Routledge, 1995), 24.

<sup>149</sup> Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 17-19.

his or her performance, as expressed in footage of Janis Joplin singing “Ball and Chain” in *Monterey Pop* or Joe Cocker singing “With a Little Help from My Friends” in *Woodstock*. As Philip Auslander has noted, while their performances are intensely physical, both performers appear to be directing their energies “inward.”<sup>150</sup> In Cocker’s case, the decision has been made by the filmmaker to include the final song from his hour-long set, with the performer covered in sweat from his onstage “work.” The film represents him as being completely absorbed in his own performance and close-up shots focus on his face and his “air guitar” movements, the latter something more associated with teenagers in their bedrooms than a celebrity performer on a concert stage. Shots of Cocker’s sweat-stained face and tee shirt and his apparently unselfconscious movements all construct an image of a performer totally absorbed in his performance. Furthermore, in *Woodstock* there are no backstage scenes in which his onstage persona might be contradicted.

Where Joe Cocker was largely unknown in the United States prior to his appearance at Woodstock, *Gimme Shelter* presents the Rolling Stones at the height of their popularity, seven years after forming in England in 1962. The tour concert footage early in *Gimme Shelter* highlights their status within 1960s rock music and as an influence on almost every other rock group of the era. The first shots in the film help to build anticipation, beginning with a blank screen and followed by excerpts from a publicity shoot that features the band’s drummer Charlie Watts riding on a donkey, wearing a helmet and then a top hat emblazoned with the stars and stripes, thereby establishing the film’s

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<sup>150</sup> Philip Auslander, *Performing Glam Rock: Gender and Theatricality in Popular Music* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 17.

American setting. At the same time, the group's vocalist Mick Jagger can be heard on the soundtrack introducing the group to a New York audience as "the greatest rock'n'roll band in the world." The delay in the synching of soundtrack and visuals increases the impact when we first witness The Rolling Stones in live performance. That impact is further enhanced by the very first shot, taken from a low angle in the audience looking up at their lead singer Jagger framed centre-stage. It is followed by a reverse shot taken from the angle of the stage, depicting the audience below as adoring fans with outstretched hands as if reaching out to touch the singer.

Together, these two shots demonstrate the way that *Gimme Shelter* allows the cinematic spectator to move between viewing positions, to see firstly from the concert audience's point of view, then from the privileged point of view of the onstage performers. The first shot affirms Jagger's celebrity status and the second establishes identification between the cinematic spectator and the celebrity performer. While the relatively high fidelity sound quality of the film's early concert footage accentuates the power and propulsive nature of the group's music, there are only fleeting glimpses of the four instrumentalists, who remain largely as shadowy figures in the background. From the *Gimme Shelter's* initial footage of the Rolling Stones in live performance, the main focus of the camera is on Jagger as he moves across the stage. He is singled out from the rest of the band and, as mentioned earlier, shots taken from a position on the stage allow the spectator to experience the audience from his point of view. Yet this establishment of a viewing position also compounds the tension in the film's subsequent portrayal of the events at

Altamont where the barrier between onstage and offstage collapses and the audience is reconfigured as alien and threatening.

Although *Gimme Shelter* depicts the Rolling Stones' four instrumentalists as fully immersed in their own performance, it presents Mick Jagger's onstage identity as far more ambivalent. Whereas the footage of Joe Cocker's performance in *Woodstock* is structured so that he appears to be expressing his innermost feelings, in *Gimme Shelter* the Rolling Stones singer is presented more as an actor who cultivates and uses different persona. As far back as the band's early days in England he had affected an exaggerated working-class Cockney accent as part of the group's constructed image as a threat to "polite" middle-class British society. In the initial live concert footage in *Gimme Shelter* he is shown performing the mock-autobiographical "Jumping Jack Flash." From the song's opening line proclaiming "I was born in a crossfire hurricane" he adopts a self-mythologizing persona reminiscent of bragging 1950s blues songs such as Willie Dixon's "Hoochie Coochie Man." Later, in "Sympathy for the Devil" he plays the devil as "a man of wealth and taste," the role representing perhaps the ultimate symbol of transgression, especially in an American context. Both in his lyrical persona and his between-song banter, Jagger is portrayed as playing on audience expectations and on the boundaries between audience and onstage performer. Far from appearing to be, in Goffman's words "taken in by his own performance,"<sup>151</sup> he always appears conscious of the audience. *Gimme Shelter* shows him baiting them with remarks such as "I think I've busted a button on my trousers. You wouldn't want them to fall down would you?" His purely

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<sup>151</sup> Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 19.

simulated interactions with the audience play on his own celebrity status and presume a desire on the part of audience members to get backstage, something that is unlikely to happen but ironically a “privilege” that *Gimme Shelter* allows to the cinematic spectator in the film’s editing suite scenes.

Jagger’s adoption of a working-class Cockney accent was part of the group’s cultivated image as a threat to “polite” society, but such markers of British social class were largely redundant in the very different American context of the late 1960s. Instead, in *Gimme Shelter* he is portrayed as a kind of shaman, recalling the representation of the rock performer in the 1960s context, as not only a celebrity, but also as the spiritual leader of a subculture, existing outside the realm of the everyday and symbolizing counterculture transgression of the rules of mainstream society. The Rolling Stones’ best-known song “Satisfaction” is represented as a counterculture anthem, the first bars of the familiar riff greeted by mass applause from the audience, a reminder that the viewing position the film creates is informed by numerous intertextual references. Such references include many years of newspaper and magazine articles in both the underground and mainstream medias, focusing on the group’s long hair, their surly manner (when compared to media-friendly groups such as the Beatles), and Jagger’s, Brian Jones’ and Keith Richard’s drug busts, all of which contributed to their carefully constructed image as anti-establishment icons.

The viewing position the film creates is also informed by the Stones’ own previous recordings, especially songs such as “Satisfaction,” “Let’s Spend the Night Together,”

“Mother’s Little Helper” and “Sympathy for the Devil,” which appeared to echo the counterculture’s rejection of dominant culture mores. Nevertheless, while much of their counterculture “authenticity” rests on their extensive recorded history as a collective entity, it is Jagger who is singled out in as the media face of the Rolling Stones. From *Gimme Shelter*’s very first shot of him centre stage, he is portrayed as more than just “a singer in a rock’n’roll band” and, while people in the concert audience are always shown trying to get closer to the celebrity performer, it is only the cinematic spectator who is permitted that privileged close-up view. The close-up focus on Jagger becomes even more concentrated in the film’s second editing suite scene where the camera completely ignores the other band members. In that scene, Jagger is not only positioned as a spokesperson for the Rolling Stones, but with *Gimme Shelter* joining the mainstream media in attributing a wider responsibility for the events at Altamont, he becomes a spokesperson for the 1960s counterculture as a whole.

In *Gimme Shelter*’s tour concert scenes Mick Jagger displays a carefully cultivated performance persona, moving between roles like an actor but always retaining a removed, slightly cynical air, both in his vocals and his between-song banter. His lyrics often appear ambivalent, for example in “Sympathy for the Devil” he lists a range of opposites such as “every cop is a criminal and all the sinners saints,” but never appears to fully reconcile them, concluding that we are all responsible for historical events such as the World War II “blitzkrieg” and the murder of the Russian Royal family by the Bolsheviks. Not only does he play the role of the devil in “Sympathy for the Devil,” but he also plays a would-be revolutionary in “Street Fighting Man,” the Boston strangler in “Midnight

Rambler” and a slave-owner in “Brown Sugar.” Lyrically he moves between simply being an observer of events and being an active participant and he constantly teases the audience with conjecture as to the extent of his identification with such roles. In *Gimme Shelter* he also plays the role of the “dandy,” both in his flamboyant dress (his cloaks and scarves) and in the parodied “high camp” of some of his onstage movements.<sup>152</sup> In one respect, this represents a challenge to the naturalization of heterosexuality in the dominant culture, something that becomes more significant in the footage from Altamont where it appears in stark contrast to the Hell’s Angels’ aggressive masculinity, but in another respect it can be seen as just part of a persona that Jagger adopts and then discards.

Mick Jagger’s shifting persona in *Gimme Shelter* is reminiscent of his role in the film *Performance* (1970)<sup>153</sup> in which he plays the chameleon-like character Turner, a “retired” rock star living in seclusion who encounters a London gangster called Chas who arrives at his house while on the run from gang rivals. The film depicts Turner as fascinated by Chas, with the rock star positioned as a double for the criminal, and in the film’s concluding scene he actually changes places with him. The role recalls the articulation of opposites in the lyrics of “Sympathy for the Devil” which appears to suggest that good and evil are simply two sides “of the same coin.”<sup>154</sup> Jagger’s performance persona is characterized by its “doubleness,” however, backstage in the editing suite he is forced to confront his double, both the celebrity performer in front of an adoring crowd and the

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<sup>152</sup> Kitts, “Documenting, Creating, and Interpreting Moments of Definition,” 721.

<sup>153</sup> *Performance* (Nicholas Roeg and Donald Cammell, UK, 1970).

<sup>154</sup> Lee and Schlain, *Acid Dreams*, 256.

shaman who has lost his power in the Altamont concert footage.<sup>155</sup> He is trapped on film and his face appears mask-like and plastic, a sign that when confronted by replays of footage of Meredith Hunter's murder he simply does not know how to react.

Out of his comfort zone in the filmmaker's backstage, Jagger resembles an actor who does not know which role he should play and what mask he should wear relative to what he's being shown. When he stands to leave, having experienced repeated replays of the murder footage, his mask of blankness slips. He becomes visibly conscious of the camera for the first and only time in the film and when he stares directly at the camera in the final freeze frame he appears like a rabbit caught in the headlights of a car. From being an instrument of identity formation in the earlier live performance scenes, the camera has become an instrument of alienation, observing the celebrity performer from a distance. In contrast to his previously established public persona, his blankness appears as a lapse and the scene itself recalls the quote from the cinéma vérité filmmaker Jean Rouch that "film has the power to reveal, with doubts, a fictional part of all of us, which for me is the most real part of an individual."<sup>156</sup> The suggestion is that we are witnessing the peeling away of layers of fictions, leaving a performer who momentarily doubts his own performance, with the scene as a whole providing a reminder of the way that direct cinema can provide an access to reality that couldn't otherwise be obtained.

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<sup>155</sup> Kitts, "Documenting, Creating, and Interpreting Moments of Definition," 721.

<sup>156</sup> Jean Rouch quoted in William Rothman, *Documentary Film Classics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 70.

### The Use of Interviews

Early direct cinema practitioners had originally rejected the interview format, believing that it distracted from the observational role of the camera, but new justifications for re-incorporating it were formulated within the rockumentary. Where in older documentaries structured around an interview format, for example the British documentary movement film *Housing Problems* (1935),<sup>157</sup> answers as well as questions were scripted, *Don't Look Back* departs from that formula in featuring interviews where reporters from the British press are positioned, as what Paul Arthur describes as “unwitting go-betweens” for the filmmaker.<sup>158</sup> As a result the media becomes a subject of the film and the press conference serves to emphasize the contrast between the artificiality of the press conference and the “authenticity” of direct cinema’s observation of it.<sup>159</sup> The interview questions are not excerpted but their lower volume when compared with the answers, along with the fact that the interviewers only appear briefly onscreen, suggests a focus more on Dylan’s responses and his performance of those responses than the questions asked.

While the press conferences in *Don't Look Back* are interviewee-led, the interviews with audience members in both *Monterey Pop* and *Woodstock* have a very different dynamic. The interview situations are constructed by the filmmakers themselves, the subjects are everyday people not celebrity performers, and their answers are frequently edited and

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<sup>157</sup> *Housing Problems* (Edgar Ainsley and Arthur Elton, UK, 1935).

<sup>158</sup> Paul Arthur, “Jargons of Authenticity (Three American Moments),” in *Theorising Documentary*, ed. Michael Renov (New York: Routledge, 1993), 123.

<sup>159</sup> *Primary* also makes use of a voiceover news report to set the scene at the beginning of the film.

compiled in post-production, thereby enhancing the filmmaker's control over the filmed environment. The answers are used to articulate general themes, as with the interviews in *Woodstock* with audience members waiting in a phone queue to ring their parents. Their responses to the (often excerpted) questions are edited and compiled in the film as a series of one-liners which taken together appear to summarize young peoples' views on the generation gap. At the same time the camera also continues its designated direct cinema function of observing and recording the language, dress, and mannerisms of the interviewees.

Mostly in *Woodstock* the interviewees are portrayed as "types," in a manner that appears more reminiscent of the portrayal of everyday people in pre-World War II Griersonian documentaries. The implication is that the structured Griersonian approach, originally necessitated by mass culture in the 1930s, is inevitable in broad documentary overviews of such large-scale, mass culture events. *Woodstock* features interviews with audience members, festival workers and people from the nearby town. They are used to provide a sample of public opinion, with each side represented. The questions frame the answers and the topics are familiar from mainstream media discourse at the time, the townspeople questioned about the disruption caused by the festival and the festival-goers on their attitudes to sex, drugs, and the generation gap. Of the interviews in the film, the only one that takes in a range of responses from the interviewees is with the young couple who have hitchhiked to the festival and who live communally but say they are not "going together." The questions focus on how well they communicate with their parents and also elicit their views on free love, religion, communism, and drugs. Yet, rather than being an

example of direct cinema's treatment of everyday people as individuals, *Woodstock* uses the two interviewees to support prevailing mainstream media stereotypes.

Throughout much of the interview the mass festival audience is visible on the other side of the split screen, suggesting that the couple have been singled out both to represent that audience and perhaps also to represent the counterculture as a whole.

In contrast to both *Monterey Pop* and *Woodstock*, *Gimme Shelter* focuses its interviews on the performers rather than the audience, with the latter depicted as increasingly out of control. The repetition of footage of Meredith Hunter's murder in its second editing suite scene recalls the repetition of questions in a courtroom interrogation. The technique compels a response to "questions" that are implied but never actually asked onscreen. At the same time, questions of responsibility for the events at Altamont had already been asked in the media (and later by Pauline Kael in *The New Yorker* in her review of *Gimme Shelter*),<sup>160</sup> providing another intertextual reference. The fact that Jagger and the other band members are being confronted by footage of a murder while the camera focuses on their reaction brings an element of indictment to the "interview," again resembling a courtroom situation where the accused is confronted by the evidence. The format allows the filmmaker to have a much greater degree of control over the situation and during the second replay scene the camera focuses almost entirely on Jagger, singling him out as the leader and media face of the Rolling Stones, implying that he is individually responsible for the events at Altamont. At the same time, the singling out of Jagger as an individual subject also suggests a return to original direct cinema methods and philosophies and to a

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<sup>160</sup> Pauline Kael, "Beyond Pirandello," *The New Yorker* 114, December 19, 1970, 113-114.

focus on the micro-political, rather than the macro-political focus of *Monterey Pop* and *Woodstock*.

The blank and uncertain Mick Jagger portrayed in the editing suite scenes in *Gimme Shelter* appears very different from the articulate and opinionated Bob Dylan shown in media interviews in *Don't Look Back*. However, in *Don't Look Back* Dylan is not being confronted with footage of a murder, but instead is being encouraged to talk about himself, while all the time surrounded by a fiercely protective entourage. By contrast, Jagger appears isolated in the unfamiliar territory of the filmmaker's editing booth. With prior knowledge of the events at Altamont, the filmmaker and by extension the cinematic spectator are entirely focused on the singer's reaction. Therefore, as mentioned in chapter two, the "interview" in *Gimme Shelter* recalls the use of the camera as catalyst in Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin's 1961 cinéma vérité documentary *Chronicle of a Summer*,<sup>161</sup> a technique that had been rejected by the original direct cinema filmmakers as being too interventionist. At times in *Chronicle of a Summer*, Morin's questioning verges on interrogation, for example in the scene with the Italian woman Marilou. Here, with no questions actually asked onscreen and a celebrity musician as subject, the provocative effect of the filmmaker's camera is not nearly as pronounced. Nevertheless, the proxy interview technique does elicit a glimpse of a very different Jagger from the rock star we see portrayed in the concert footage earlier in *Gimme Shelter* and because his persona is so carefully constructed even a brief glimpse behind the mask has a dramatic effect.

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<sup>161</sup> *Chronicle of a Summer* (Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin, France, 1961).

### **The Audience as a Subject**

As my previous discussion of interviews has already demonstrated, the rockumentaries are about audiences as well as performers, for example an early scene in *Monterey Pop* focuses on the distinctive fashions of the era; the multi-coloured clothing, hats, scarves, and headbands, women's long and short dresses, and men's long hair. The styles of the audience reflect those of the musicians, thereby demonstrating the role played by popular musicians as style leaders. In both films the audiences are portrayed as being an integral part of the performances, although audience members are always shown reacting to the performers and seldom initiating action as subjects in their own right. By means of intercutting each of the films gives the impression that individual audience members are reacting directly to events onstage. There are numerous shots of people dancing or just looking in amazement following what appear to be dazzling feats of musicianship, such as during Ravi Shankar's performance in *Monterey Pop* or during Santana drummer Michael Shrieve's drum solo in *Woodstock*. In this respect the films structure a relay between audience and performer while at the same time retaining the distance between them. The integrated focus on both audience and performer allows the cinematic spectator a view from both perspectives, a view that is impossible for the festival audience who are not only denied such privileged access to the performers, but also can never see themselves. The connection with the cinematic spectator becomes even more overt in *Woodstock* when the lyrics from Country Joe MacDonald's "The-I-Feel-Like-I'm-Fixin'-To-Die Rag" (including the line "What are 'we' fighting for?") appear as

subtitles at the bottom of the screen during his performance.<sup>162</sup> This invitation to participate, one achieved through uniquely cinematic means, further highlights the connection between the festival and cinematic audiences, with the implication that *Woodstock* is making claims to having a far wider relevance.

Depictions of the audience in *Monterey Pop*, *Woodstock*, and *Gimme Shelter* reflect both the utopian communalism and the dystopian depersonalization of the mass. In *Monterey Pop*, footage of the applause that follows the Ravi Shankar group's performance becomes a close-up focus on thousands of hands in montage. The scene is the only instance in the film in which audience applause is explicitly represented for any length of time and it suggests a symbolic consensus and a widespread approval of both the festival itself and the wider 1960s counterculture. Yet, the abstract nature of the representation is also reminiscent of older forms of the documentary in which such representations function to suggest scale and especially unanimity. It recalls forms previously regarded as being foreign to direct cinema, such as the films of John Grierson and the British documentary movement and those of Leni Riefenstahl, as well as the Soviet montage films of the 1920s. Removed from location or context, the shots of thousands of applauding hands appear more as a hyperbolic representation of applause, in effect constituting what Siegfried Kracauer referred to as a "mass ornament."<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Sheila Whiteley, "1,2,3 What Are We Fighting For? Music, Meaning and 'The Star Spangled Banner,'" in *Remembering Woodstock*, ed. Andy Bennett (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2004), 22.

<sup>163</sup> Siegfried Kracauer, "Cult of Distraction: On Berlin's Picture Palaces," *New German Critique* 40 (1987): 91-96.

Most likely the fact that large masses of people were not the traditional subject matter for direct cinema caused a problem for the filmmakers who were forced to fall back into pre-existing documentary modes in the festival rockumentaries. In *Woodstock*, multiple split screens are employed to provide a constant reminder of the audience's presence, their skin colours in the daytime sun vividly contrasted with the predominant blues and reds of the nighttime musical performances. Shots from the back of the stage depict solo performers such as John Sebastian as lone individuals set against a massive backdrop of largely indistinguishable bodies. As Romney has described, they appear as "a lavish spectacle, the panoramic tableau of a supposed nation."<sup>164</sup> With the audience members portrayed as a mass it is easier to attribute collective characteristics to them. At times they are even depicted collectively as less than human and at one point in the film the rock promoter Bill Graham describes them as "ants," as if they were an infestation, an image that also brings to mind some of the urban problems in America's actual cities at the time.

The festival rockumentaries trace a shifting and contested boundary between audience and performer. Where *Monterey Pop* and *Woodstock* both depict the audience in reaction to, or at least in relation to, the onstage performances, *Gimme Shelter* focuses more on events and interactions within the audience itself. The canted camera angles of aerial shots taken from the Rolling Stones' helicopter evoke a sense of vertigo. Initially at least, the aerial shots also establish a distance, placing both cinematic spectator and filmmaker literally and symbolically above the mayhem on the ground. As in both *Monterey Pop*

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<sup>164</sup> Romney, "Access All Areas: the Real Space of the Rock Documentary," 89.

and *Woodstock* the audience is largely portrayed as a mass, but in *Gimme Shelter* it becomes the site of a dystopian carnival, in Romney's words an "uncontainable anarchic rabble of sans culottes."<sup>165</sup> Hand-held camera footage from within the audience shows sudden bursts of violence, with the Hell's Angels using their pool cues as weapons and the implication that violence may erupt without warning at any moment. The shakiness of the handheld camera footage adds to the overall sense of unpredictability and shots of the bewildered and frightened faces of audience members communicate the impression that the Altamont audience is a dangerous place to be.

Much of that sense of danger and unpredictability comes from *Gimme Shelter's* portrayal of the Hell's Angels. The Angels had been celebrated as modern-day outlaws by some sections of the counterculture<sup>166</sup> and had been used as security at San Francisco concerts by the Grateful Dead. In reality, the gang's paramilitary structures and their propensity for racism, misogyny and violence, were very much at odds with the individual and social freedom advocated by the counterculture.<sup>167</sup> They are singled out in the Altamont audience footage, with shots focusing on their gang patches, their lead-weighted pool cues, and especially on their aggressive body language. Footage of the confrontations between individual Hell's Angels and first Marty Balin and then Paul Kantner of the Jefferson Airplane illustrates their barely-concealed contempt for the "love generation," something that had already been evident for a number of years, as exemplified by

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<sup>165</sup> Romney, "Access All Areas: the Real Space of the Rock Documentary," 89.

<sup>166</sup> John Wood, "Hell's Angels and the Illusion of the Counterculture," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 37, no.2 (2003): 336-351.

<sup>167</sup> See Hunter S. Thompson, *Hell's Angels: A Strange and Terrible Saga* (New York: Random House, 1967).

incidents such as when the same Oakland chapter of the Angels had attacked a peace march in October 1965.<sup>168</sup>

*Gimme Shelter* also focuses on individual audience members seemingly out-of-control on “bad” drugs. As he steps out of the helicopter upon arriving at the concert venue, Jagger is shown being punched in the face by someone from the crowd. Other shots in the film show a man with glazed eyes rolling on the ground screaming and then grabbing the sound recorder’s microphone before eventually embracing him. We see another bearded, denim-clad man standing just to the side of the stage, clenching and unclenching his fists while the Rolling Stones play “Under My Thumb.” Such images convey the sense that, while the Hell’s Angels may be the main perpetrators, they are far from the only source of violence within the crowd. While *Monterey Pop* and *Woodstock* both showed the audience respecting the boundary of the stage, *Gimme Shelter* shows that boundary dissolving. Furthermore, in contrast to the earlier festivals, the Altamont stage is low, the performers are only slightly elevated above the level of the audience, and the sound system is clearly inadequate, thereby reducing the power and scope of the music.<sup>169</sup> In footage of earlier Rolling Stones’ concerts any stage invaders are depicted as adoring fans who are quickly and efficiently ejected by security-men, but in the Altamont scenes the audience actually takes over the stage and the musicians are forced to stop the performance as the spectacle of violence takes precedence. Where *Monterey Pop* incorporates shots of the performers as part of the audience and *Woodstock* depicts audience and performer as separate but co-existing as part of a “Woodstock nation,”

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<sup>168</sup> Wood, “Hell’s Angels and the Illusion of the Counterculture,” 338.

<sup>169</sup> Kitts, “Documenting, Creating, and Interpreting Moments of Definition,” 720.

*Gimme Shelter* highlights the relationship between audience and performer as one of conflict and fear. In the end, *Gimme Shelter*'s documenting of spontaneous events within the Altamont audience is likely to have provided a cautionary lesson for filmmakers, music industry people and musicians alike, with later rockumentaries such as *The Last Waltz* re-inscribing the notion of the stage as boundary, excluding the audience, and focusing entirely on the onstage performances.

### **Rockumentary Soundtracks**

Originally the direct cinema filmmakers rejected non-diegetic soundtrack music as part of their rejection of all forms of persuasion within the documentary. As Michael Renov has described, it had often been used “to heighten emotional impact”<sup>170</sup> in pre-World War II documentaries such as *Triumph of the Will* (1935), where militaristic Wagnerian music was employed to heighten the sense of drama in the film’s portrayal of the 1934 Nazi Party Congress.<sup>171</sup> It had also been used in British documentary movement films such as *Night Mail* (1936), in which Benjamin Britten’s lyrical string music played an important part in the film’s promotion of the unifying role played by the mail train and the British Post Office.<sup>172</sup> As part of their desire to distance themselves from all such propaganda devices, the early direct cinema filmmakers only included music if it occurred within a film’s diegesis. However, the rockumentaries’ focus on rock musicians and live musical events gave them the opportunity to re-incorporate music while still adhering to direct cinema philosophies regarding the restriction to diegetic sound. In addition, the musical

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<sup>170</sup> Michael Renov, “Introduction,” in *Theorising Documentary*, ed. Michael Renov (New York: Routledge, 1993), 2.

<sup>171</sup> *Triumph of The Will* (Leni Riefenstahl, Germany, 1935).

<sup>172</sup> *Night Mail* (Harry Watt and Basil Wright, UK, 1936).

subject matter and the much-improved quality of the sound recording technology also gave the rockumentaries the opportunity to connect with an increasingly significant youth audience, one already well-accustomed to high-fidelity sound recordings in both popular music and film.

For its part, the *Monterey Pop* soundtrack embraces the heterogeneity of what was known as “rock” music, encompassing various 1960s hybrids of folk, blues, soul, jazz and rock. It not only traverses musical genres, but also different cultures, featuring British groups such as the Who and the (British/American) Jimi Hendrix Experience, African jazz from Hugh Masekela, and Indian music from sitar player Ravi Shankar and his trio. By contrast, the *Woodstock* soundtrack suggests a conscious return to more traditional musical genres. It features folk and country music from Richie Havens, Joan Baez, John Sebastian, Arlo Guthrie, Country Joe MacDonald and Crosby, Stills, and Nash, blues from Canned Heat and Ten Years After, and 1950s rock’n’roll from Sha Na Na. With the notable exception of Jimi Hendrix, and to some extent Santana and Sly and The Family Stone, the *Woodstock* line-up reflects the increasing aesthetic and political conservatism of rock at the end of the 1960s. In fact, that trend was to continue for much of the following decade and was further manifested in the movement of rock away from both radical politics and musical experimentation and into larger and larger stadiums and into the realm of spectacle. In many ways, *Woodstock* predicts that shift by largely focusing on the visually spectacular instrumentalists, such as Ten Years After guitarist Alvin Lee, and Santana drummer Michael Shrieve, their virtuosity confirmed by shots of individual audience members apparently reacting in amazement at their musicianship.

On a number of occasions in *Monterey Pop* the soundtrack music shifts from diegetic to non-diegetic. While diegetic sound is contained within the physical space in which it is performed, non-diegetic sound is a cinematic creation that transcends the boundaries of diegetic space. In *Monterey Pop* that movement into the realm of what Michel Chion has called “acousmatic”<sup>173</sup> sound is exemplified by the scene in which the Country Joe and The Fish instrumental “Section 43” plays to multiple shots of people in the audience. At first we see the group performing onstage, thereby establishing the diegetic source of the music, but gradually the focus of the camera shifts to the festival grounds. Yet, the live performance of the song continues on the film’s non-diegetic soundtrack, although no longer from an obvious onscreen source. As the focus of the camera moves away from the specific location of the onstage performances, the shift from diegetic to non-diegetic sound highlights the all-encompassing effect of the music. In this respect, the transition from one to another can be seen not only as a movement from the festival audience to the cinematic audience, but also to a broader set of cultural formations symbolized by the music.

*Monterey Pop* culminates in Ravi Shankar’s extended, largely improvised, Indian raga, appearing in the film as another example of “acousmatic” sound, although this time moving from non-diegetic to diegetic.<sup>174</sup> Shankar’s performance is by far the longest included in the film and is documented in such a way as to emphasize the transformative qualities of the music. As it begins, the focus is on the outskirts of the stadium, with

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<sup>173</sup> Acousmatic sound has been theorised by French composer Pierre Schaefer as “sounds one hears without seeing their originating cause.” See Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 71.

<sup>174</sup> Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 71.

mobile handheld camera footage traversing the stalls and a varied and colourful array of festivalgoers. Over the raga's twenty minute duration the shots move gradually from a wide framing on the audience to close-up shots of onstage performers, finally identifying them as the source of the music. By means of intercutting, *Monterey Pop* highlights the interplay between the musicians, helping to build a tension that is finally released in an aural and visual conclusion. Shots of the interactions between the onstage performers are interspersed with glimpses of audience members seemingly transfixed, with the implication that the music has a spiritual power, its spirituality seemingly enhanced by the fact that it is played by "exotic" Indian musicians.

*Monterey Pop* and *Woodstock* also employ non-diegetic soundtrack music. For example, the opening scene of *Monterey Pop* features a studio recording of Scott Mackenzie's "San Francisco," accompanying footage of both performers and audience arriving for the festival. The song's chiming guitars and idealistic lyrics, including lines such as "If you're going to San Francisco. Be sure to wear some flowers in your hair," combine with shots of friendly, welcoming performers and audience members to establish the Monterey festival as part of the "Summer of Love." At the same time, the lyrics to the song also provide details of the festival's setting, in a reminder of the way that the direct cinema filmmakers often used intertextual references from other media to provide background information. Non-diegetic music is also employed to set an idealistic mood in the opening scene of *Woodstock* where a studio recording of Crosby, Stills and Nash's "Long Time Gone" plays over a montage of shots, firstly of farm-workers and then of hippies in the fields. Both "Long Time Gone" and the live recording of Canned Heat's "Going Up the

Country” which follows it on the soundtrack assist in the film’s evocation of a pastoral Eden, at least before the influx of half a million festival goers. Non-diegetic music can also be heard over *Woodstock’s* closing credits, with the soundtrack moving from Jimi Hendrix’s raw and visceral live version of “The Star Spangled Banner” in the film’s final live performance to a polished studio recording of Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young’s cover of Joni Mitchell’s post-festival eulogy “Woodstock.” The fact that Hendrix’s angry deconstruction of the American national anthem, accompanied by footage of festival stragglers in the mud and rubbish, is followed by the lilting folk-rock harmonies of “Woodstock” on the soundtrack, bridging a montage of shots that represent the festival at its most celebratory, merely serves to reinforce the idealized nature of the film’s conclusion.

Whereas both *Monterey Pop* and *Woodstock* employ non-diegetic soundtrack music to establish, and in the latter to re-establish, an overall utopian mood, *Gimme Shelter* uses a studio recording of the film’s title song to foreshadow events at the Rolling Stones’ Altamont concert. A segment of the song plays on the soundtrack as we witness an aerial shot of never-ending lines of cars stalled along the country narrow road while attempting to reach the Altamont destination, the people spilling out in an early indication of the overcrowded nature of the show. The song’s trebly, needling guitar riff and apocalyptic lines such as “War, children, it’s just a shot away” combine with the canted angles of the helicopter footage to lend a portentousness to preparations for the upcoming concert. A studio recording of “Gimme Shelter” is reprised on the soundtrack at the end of the film, along with footage of shocked and depressed people fleeing the Altamont site the

morning after the concert. In that context, the apocalyptic tone of the song's music and lyrics also serves to evoke the wider socio-political climate of the late 1960s, in which a disillusioned counterculture struggled to escape from its own internal divisions and from the predominance of violence in contemporary American society.

## Chapter Four

### The Rockumentaries and the Politics of the 1960s

While Richard Barsam has argued that direct cinema's commitment to pure observation "fails to situate its subjects within sociological or historical contexts,"<sup>175</sup> others, such as Keith Beattie have responded that, although the movement dispenses with rhetorical or didactic methods of contextualization, it does so visually, through showing.<sup>176</sup> In this respect, *Monterey Pop* (1968) *Woodstock* (1970), and *Gimme Shelter* (1970)<sup>177</sup> function as archival documents of their era in a way that is reminiscent of cinéma vérité's reverse ethnography in which Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin turned their ethnographic focus back on Paris and Parisiens in *Chronicle of a Summer* (1961) and Chris Marker did much the same in *Le Joli Mai* (1963).<sup>178</sup> To this end, all three festival rockumentaries communicate a considerable amount of ethnographic and historical information, in their documentation of the speech, dress, behaviour and concerns of people in the festival audiences and also of the styles and subject matter of the music. This material also provides valuable insights into the social and political context in which the rockumentaries were both produced and received.

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<sup>175</sup> Richard Barsam quoted in Beattie, *Documentary Display: Re-viewing Nonfiction film and Video* (London: Wallflower Press, 2008), 60.

<sup>176</sup> Keith Beattie, *Documentary Display*, 60.

<sup>177</sup> *Monterey Pop* (D. A. Pennebaker, USA, 1968), *Woodstock* (Michael Wadleigh, USA, 1970), *Gimme Shelter* (Albert Maysles, David Maysles and Charlotte Zwerin, USA, 1970)

<sup>178</sup> *Chronicle of a Summer* (Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin, France, 1961). *Le Joli Mai* (Chris Marker, France, 1963).

Viewed as a trilogy, *Monterey Pop*, *Woodstock* and *Gimme Shelter* trace the shifting tensions within the counterculture over the second half of the 1960s. Those tensions largely reflected the three-way divide between those who believed in direct political action, those who believed in individual spiritual solutions, and those who believed in the need for a collective cultural transformation. *Monterey Pop* attempts to mediate those tensions in its representation of the Monterey festival as not only a celebration of individual spiritual liberation, but also of countercultural community. It portrays a context in which it is possible to imagine a very different social order, unclouded by the Vietnam War or the contemporary confrontations on American streets. On a much larger scale than *Monterey Pop*, *Woodstock* foregrounds the rock festival as essentially a communal experience. Yet *Woodstock* also acknowledges the ever-present backdrop of the Vietnam War and the tensions between collective and personal liberation within the counterculture that lie barely beneath the surface. Released only eight months later, in the wake of the killings at Jackson State and Kent State, the deaths of Janis Joplin and Jimi Hendrix, and the Manson murders, *Gimme Shelter* presents the same counterculture racked by both internal and external tensions, and as incapable of transformation, either on a collective or a personal level.

### **The Socio-Political Context of the Counterculture**

For a majority of middle-class Americans, the first two decades after World War II were characterized by unprecedented economic prosperity. This was the era of the post-war

population explosion known as the “baby boom,”<sup>179</sup> with an increasingly wealthy, largely white suburban middle-class and a rapidly growing consumer society. Yet the post-World War II era was also one of widespread contradictions, with poverty and institutional racism still a fact of everyday life for many Americans. Throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s the ever-present shadow of the Cold War and the very real prospect of a Third World War played a large part in stifling social and political dissent. By the mid 1960s, however, many of the post-war generation were reaching adulthood and were becoming increasingly disillusioned with the rampant materialism of the consumer society and increasingly resistant to authority in general. Becoming aware of the contradictions behind the complacent façade of prosperity, they grew openly critical of the established social and political institutions. It was this disenfranchised youth demographic who were at the heart of what became known as the counterculture.<sup>180</sup>

The counterculture was a diverse social formation unified by what Daniel Foss and Ralph Larkin have described as “intense generational resentment.”<sup>181</sup> There were a number of parallels between the 1960s counterculture and the 1950s “Beats.” Both movements shared an alienation from mainstream American life, an interest in experimenting with drugs and sex, an attraction to non-mainstream spirituality, and a romantic yearning for

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<sup>179</sup> The “baby boom” is generally regarded as being comprised of people born between 1946 and 1964. See Linda Williams and Michael Hammond, “The Sixties: Introduction,” in *Contemporary American Cinema*, eds. Linda Williams and Michael Hammond (Maidenhead: Open University/ McGraw-Hill, 2006), 4-5.

<sup>180</sup> Thomas Schatz, “The New Hollywood,” in *Hollywood: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies*, ed. Thomas Schatz (London: Routledge, 2004), 291.

<sup>181</sup> Daniel A. Foss and Ralph W. Larkin, “From *The Gates of Eden* to *Day of the Locust*: An Analysis of Dissident Youth Movement of the 1960s and its Heirs of the Early 1970s - The Post-Movement Groups,” *Theory and Society* 3:1 (1976), 47.

what they regarded as “authentic” experiences.<sup>182</sup> In search of such experiences, the Beats turned to African-American nightclub culture and jazz music.<sup>183</sup> The 1960s counterculture was similarly attracted to the perceived authenticity of the blues, but it also differed from the Beats in its championing of the newly emergent rock music.<sup>184</sup> Rock music was a vital ingredient in what Foss and Larkin have called the “shared subculture of dissidence.”<sup>185</sup> The extra volume demanded attention, the driving rhythms were suited to dancing and therefore contributed to a collective awareness, and its energy communicated a sense of immediacy and being in the “now.” In David James’ words, rock became “the preferred medium for sub-cultural mobilization.”<sup>186</sup> It was also the music that best expressed counterculture alienation, for example in Rolling Stones’ songs such as “Satisfaction” and “Paint it Black,” in “The End” and “When the Music’s Over” by the Doors, and especially in “My Generation” by the Who which contained the lyric line “Hope I die before I get old.” The Who’s performance of “My Generation” in *Monterey Pop* culminates in the destruction of the band’s instruments, a theatrically violent representation of the frustration and alienation felt by many young people at the time.

By the mid 1960s signs of the counterculture had emerged in a number of cities around the Western world, most notably in San Francisco, but also in New York, Amsterdam,

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<sup>182</sup> Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 150.

<sup>183</sup> Edward P. Morgan, *The 60s Experience: Hard Lessons about Modern America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 172.

<sup>184</sup> Morgan, *The 60s Experience*, 172.

<sup>185</sup> Foss and Larkin, “From *The Gates of Eden* to *Day of the Locust*,” 61.

<sup>186</sup> David E. James, *Allegories of Cinema: American Film in the Sixties* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 348.

London and Paris. At the same time, the intensified political atmosphere of the era lead many young people to focus more on the idea of social revolution than the politics of the self.<sup>187</sup> In the United States the “Old Left” (which included socialists and communists) had been decimated by McCarthyism and the Cold War and discredited by its uncertainty over identification with the Soviet Union.<sup>188</sup> A new generation of politically radical “New Left” activists emerged in the early 1960s, mainly concerned with issues such as civil rights, civil liberties, and nuclear disarmament.<sup>189</sup> Student-led New Left organizations such as Students for a Democratic Society challenged the social and political establishment and demanded the reform of institutions such as universities that they claimed had been usurped by “a self-serving power elite.”<sup>190</sup> Such organizations were heavily influenced by the heightened sense of political urgency brought about by flare-ups of civil unrest across the country, including confrontations between the police and civil rights protestors in Alabama, the black riots or “rebellions” on the streets of New York and Los Angeles various protests against the American government’s sudden escalation of the war in Vietnam in 1965.<sup>191</sup> As Edward Morgan has suggested, many young people regarded America’s participation in the Vietnam War as an example of “a technocratic culture gone mad,” an irrational action by a supposedly rational society.<sup>192</sup>

The second half of the 1960s saw increasingly large-scale national demonstrations

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<sup>187</sup> Foss and Larkin, “From *The Gates of Eden* to *Day of the Locust*,” 47.

<sup>188</sup> Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope: Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1987), 27.

<sup>189</sup> Gitlin, 83.

<sup>190</sup> Martin A. Lee and Bruce Schlain, *Acid Dreams: The Complete Social History of LSD, the CIA, the Sixties, and Beyond* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1985), 127.

<sup>191</sup> Isserman and Kazin, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s*, 127-145. Gitlin, 168.

<sup>192</sup> Morgan, *The 60s Experience*, 173.

against the war, culminating in the second of two anti-Vietnam War Moratoriums when an estimated 750,000 people descended on the nation's capital in November 1969, the demonstration at the time the largest peace march in American history.<sup>193</sup> Nevertheless, while the political activists and the “hipsters” shared common ground in their opposition to the war and as expressions of what Martin Lee and Bruce Schlain have termed the ‘Great Refusal,’ there were also significant divisions between them.<sup>194</sup> The political activists believed that liberation would only come through the transformation of state institutions, but “the inner subjective world”<sup>195</sup> still remained the focus of much of the counterculture's attention and for many the conduct of the Vietnam War and the violence on American streets only confirmed the need to turn their attention inwards towards a politics of the self.

### **The Radical Politics of the Self**

*Monterey Pop*, *Woodstock* and *Gimme Shelter* trace the shifting tensions within the counterculture between those who believed in direct political action and those who believed in the transformation of the self, either through individual spiritual solutions or collective cultural transformation as the main prerequisite for wider societal change. As Lee and Schlain have pointed out, many sixties activists were as much concerned with “psychic liberation” as they were with economic and political issues.<sup>196</sup> Many sought liberation in experimentation with drugs and “free love,” in Eastern spiritualities, and in communal living and the formation of back-to-the-earth communes. While such a

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<sup>193</sup> Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope: Days of Rage*, 394.

<sup>194</sup> Lee and Schlain, *Acid Dreams*, 133.

<sup>195</sup> Morgan, *The 60s Experience*, 171.

<sup>196</sup> Lee and Schlain, 129.

rejection of politics could itself be regarded as implicitly political, there was a widespread suspicion of collective goals and organized political programmes.<sup>197</sup> At the same time, the experimentation with mind-expanding drugs and alternative ways of living implicitly involved a rejection of dominant culture ideologies such as consumer capitalism and individualism and also of mainstream institutions such as the nuclear family and the Christian Church. In addition, with both marijuana and LSD (from late 1966) being illegal, drugs and radical politics were often inextricably linked.<sup>198</sup> The desire to reconcile the often contradictory aspects of the counterculture eventually led to the formation of much looser political groupings such as the Yippies,<sup>199</sup> with their concept of revolution as “a spontaneous anarchic explosion of individuals.”<sup>200</sup> As one of the Yippie leaders Jerry Rubin commented, they wanted to create “a new myth of the dope-taking, freedom-loving, politically committed activist.”<sup>201</sup>

### **Experimentation with Drugs**

Drugs provided, in Morgan’s words, “a kind of de-conditioning that opened one’s senses to a different reality or a different awareness of reality.”<sup>202</sup> The experience of smoking marijuana highlighted the inaccuracy and dishonesty of hysterical descriptions of the drug’s effects by the government and the media.<sup>203</sup> However, within the counterculture much greater claims were made for hallucinogenic drugs such as LSD, mescaline and

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<sup>197</sup> Morgan, *The 60s Experience*, 169.

<sup>198</sup> Lee and Schlain, *Acid Dreams*, 128.

<sup>199</sup> Short for “Youth International Party.” See Lee and Schlain, 206.

<sup>200</sup> Foss and Larkin, “From *The Gates of Eden to Day of the Locust*,” 49.

<sup>201</sup> Jerry Rubin quoted in Lee and Schlain, 206.

<sup>202</sup> Morgan, 199.

<sup>203</sup> Lee and Schlain, 129.

peyote, which were widely regarded as “a means of achieving a higher state of consciousness.”<sup>204</sup> Music happenings such as the Trips Festivals and the Human Be-Ins attempted to recreate the inner experience of an LSD trip, both visually (through multi-coloured light shows and swirling stage projections) and aurally (through “acid rock” music). Acid rock employed electronic spatial effects, such as echo, reverb and phasing, on the guitars and keyboards in order to evoke a transition into a different psychological state. That transition was assisted by the fact that audiences at these events were often stoned on marijuana or tripping on LSD and, in combination with the music and dancing, the drugs became an important ingredient in the communal experience, an experience that the later rock festivals sought to emulate.

With its roots in the happenings, the Monterey Pop Festival featured several of the San Francisco acid rock groups and *Monterey Pop* includes live performance footage of two of them, the Jefferson Airplane and Country Joe and the Fish. The acid rock groups’ psychedelic stage projections also comprise the background for the film’s opening title sequence, giving the impression that the cinematic spectator is entering an altered state of consciousness. The colourful, swirling images compose a filter through which the cinematic spectator may view the subsequent footage of the festival. They also set the tone for the film’s constructed sense “of openness and wonder.”<sup>205</sup> While never mentioned directly, hallucinogenic drugs are represented positively in *Monterey Pop*, as mind-expanding and as the implied source of the spectacular stage projections, as well as the source of some of the aurally expansive and evocative musical sounds.

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<sup>204</sup> Foss and Larkin, “From *The Gates of Eden* to *Day of the Locust*,” 49.

<sup>205</sup> Morgan, *The 60s Experience*, 200.

By contrast, *Woodstock* displays a distinct ambivalence towards hallucinogenic drugs. While several of the acid-rock groups played at the festival, only Country Joe and the Fish<sup>206</sup> were included in the original cut of the film, reflecting the change in musical fashion in the two years since Monterey.<sup>207</sup> Jimi Hendrix plays a disinterested version of his 1967 British hit “Purple Haze” and Sly and the Family Stone sing “I Want to Take You Higher,” the line “Music is flashin’ me” evoking the hallucinogenic drug experience, but the only other reference to LSD in *Woodstock* comes in warnings from the festival organizers about the “bad acid” making the rounds. There is an implied distinction made between the harmful drug LSD and the more “natural” drug marijuana, perhaps reflecting the film’s constructed sense of going back to nature. At the same time this ambivalence may also reflect the fact that *Woodstock* was produced with Warner Brothers’ backing and was therefore aimed at a more mainstream audience than *Monterey Pop*. Nevertheless, smoking marijuana is presented in the film as an everyday ritual, contributing to the sense of countercultural community, as demonstrated by the montage of people in the audience lighting joints, pipes and bongos and passing them around. *Woodstock* also portrays the communal marijuana ritual as one shared by audience and performer alike, with Arlo Guthrie describing “Bringing in a couple of keys” in his song “Mr. Customs Man” and, in his only appearance in the film, Jerry Garcia of the Grateful Dead shown holding up a large joint to the camera as if inviting the cinematic spectator to join in.

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<sup>206</sup> Their song in *Woodstock* is the very un-psychedelic “Rock and Soul Music.”

<sup>207</sup> The Jefferson Airplane is included in the director’s cut of *Woodstock*.

As Lee and Schlain have suggested, the counterculture made a distinction between “people drugs,” such as marijuana and LSD, and “death drugs,” such as alcohol, speed and heroin.<sup>208</sup> By the late 1960s the drug scene was changing, with the introduction of STP (often passed off as LSD) and speed and heroin replacing LSD (with the latter often also cut with speed).<sup>209</sup> The influx of heroin, especially, led to an increasing number of deaths from accidental overdoses. At the same time, the realization that there were huge profits to be made in dealing led to drugs becoming very much a black-market commodity, in contradiction of original counterculture beliefs about communalism and sharing. The Hell’s Angels were hired to provide security for the Rolling Stones at the Altamont concert because they were supposedly kindred spirits, but in fact they were already heavily involved selling drugs to the counterculture.<sup>210</sup> There is a clear suggestion in *Gimme Shelter* that the Altamont concert was a bad trip from the very start. As we see the audience arriving at the Speedway site there is a shot of a man offering “hashish, LSD and Psilocybin” (magic mushrooms) for sale. The film also has shots of individual people in the audience having bad drug experiences. We witness a man rolling on the ground screaming, another approaching the organizers about somebody who is “really freaking out over there,” and we hear a woman say “I’m stoned on LSD and don’t belong here man.” The replayed footage of the murder victim Meredith Hunter shows a man seemingly under the influence of drugs with a gun in his hand. The shakiness of the handheld camera footage adds to the impression of a drug-fueled edginess within the

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<sup>208</sup> Lee and Schlain, *Acid Dreams*, 262.

<sup>209</sup> Morgan, *The 60s Experience*, 184.

<sup>210</sup> John Wood, “Hell’s Angels and the Illusion of the Counterculture.” *The Journal of Popular Culture* 37, no.2 (2003), 344.

audience, with a sense that random violence might break out at any time. In the end, *Gimme Shelter* portrays a dysfunctional politics of the self and implicates the counterculture's experimentation with drugs as responsible for the tragic events at Altamont. At the same time, the film's linking of drugs and violence also parallels the prevailing mainstream media view of the counterculture at the end of the decade and the proliferation of LSD-related horror stories in the weeks and months following the gruesome Manson murders.

### **The Search for Community**

The counterculture's exploration of inner subjective worlds through the use of hallucinogenic drugs was intricately connected to the search for new communal experiences. That search for community manifested itself in many diverse ways, the communal experience of rock music, drugs, group sex, and in the formation of back-to-nature communes.<sup>211</sup> It was also expressed in communal happenings such as the Trips Festivals and Human Be-Ins, where the combination of drugs, visual stimuli and dancing contributed to a sense of what Morgan has called "tribalistic bonding."<sup>212</sup> The first Human-Be-In was in fact conceived as "A Gathering of Tribes."<sup>213</sup> Yet the experience of live rock music was contradictory. On the one hand, the sheer volume and the feeling of total immersion in the concert environment could lead to introspection, but on the other hand, being part of a large audience focused on the same event was a communal

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<sup>211</sup> Morgan, *The 60s Experience*, 176.

<sup>212</sup> Morgan, 194.

<sup>213</sup> Lee and Schlain, *Acid Dreams*, 159.

experience.<sup>214</sup> For its part, *Monterey Pop*'s combination of a culturally and musically diverse soundtrack with shots of a friendly, welcoming, and ethnically diverse audience suggests a utopian vision of communal harmony. Furthermore, the onscreen smiling faces looking directly at the camera and idealistic non-diegetic soundtrack songs such as "San Francisco" and "California Dreaming" combine to welcome the cinematic spectator to become part of that community. The film's constructed sense of community is further illustrated in the footage of *Monterey Pop*'s concluding performance, by Indian sitar player Ravi Shankar and his trio. The montage of increasingly close-up shots of thousands of applauding hands represents the audience as one, united in their celebration of the festival and by extension in their celebration of the counterculture itself.<sup>215</sup>

At the same time, many young people within the counterculture sought communal experiences in the formation of back-to-the-earth communes. Such rural communities represented a rejection of the materialism and consumerism of the dominant culture, as well as a refusal to conform to its social and sexual mores. Yet the commune not only represented an escape from mainstream society, but also a rejection of existing political alternatives. The utopian nature of this search for community is best illustrated in the opening scene of *Woodstock* that evokes an idealized pastoral Eden.<sup>216</sup> There are shots of farm workers in the fields and golden sunlight streaming through the trees, the effect enhanced by the nostalgic tones of Crosby Stills and Nash's "Long Time Gone" on the

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<sup>214</sup> Morgan, *The 60s Experience*, 194.

<sup>215</sup> William Rothman, *Documentary Film Classics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 208.

<sup>216</sup> Thomas M. Kitts, "Documenting, Creating, and Interpreting Moments of Definition: *Monterey Pop*, *Woodstock* and *Gimme Shelter*." *The Journal of Popular Culture* 43, no.4 (2009), 719.

soundtrack. The scene then cuts to shots of hippies arriving for the festival, along with the rural celebration of Canned Heat's "Going Up the Country." We see bearded and longhaired men, women wearing long dresses, and barefooted children, the dress styles reminiscent of the early American immigrants. The scene suggests nostalgia for an imaginary past, although in reality the hippie dream of returning to the lifestyle of the early immigrants often also meant a return to some of the social and gender inequalities of the 19<sup>th</sup> century American pioneers.<sup>217</sup>

While the rock festivals largely depended on modern electronic technology and musical instruments, the late 1960s also witnessed a return to more traditional American musical genres. In *Woodstock* that sense of going "back" is most evident in the country-blues music of Canned Heat, but it can also be heard in the traditional folk of Joan Baez, in the 1950s rock'n'roll of Sha Na Na, and in the country music played by John Sebastian and Country Joe MacDonald. The sense of going back to nature, to a state of childlike innocence, is also portrayed in footage of members of the festival audience playing games in the mud after the rain and swimming naked in the nearby lake. As mentioned in an earlier chapter, it is further evidenced by the repetition of a shot of pristine green fields from early in the film as part of the closing title sequence. Where *Woodstock's* final scene depicts the environmental devastation caused by over 400,000 festival-goers, with Jimi Hendrix's version of "The Star Spangled Banner" evoking the latest technology of war on the soundtrack, the film's closing credits feature shots of an untouched pre-festival

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<sup>217</sup> The romantic ideal of returning to the soil was often disastrous for young people from privileged urban backgrounds who frequently had little experience of manual labour and no experience of agricultural practices.

rural utopia notable for the complete absence of people. On the soundtrack we hear Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young's version of Joni Mitchell's "Woodstock," the lyrics of the song suggesting "We've got to get ourselves back to the garden,"

By the time of *Gimme Shelter*, the search for communal experiences has given way to a sense of desperate individualism. In the film, the Rolling Stones are no longer portrayed as part of a common countercultural community in the manner of the performers in *Monterey Pop*. Instead they are depicted as international rock stars, surrounded by adoring fans just wanting to reach out and touch them. The Stones are part of a multi-million dollar music industry and in the negotiations around the Altamont concert they are represented by Melvin Belli, high profile lawyer to the stars, his clients including the likes of Errol Flynn, Zsa Zsa Gabor, Lana Turner, Mohammed Ali, and Lee Harvey Oswald's killer Jack Ruby.<sup>218</sup> In contrast to *Monterey Pop* and *Woodstock*, *Gimme Shelter* portrays the communal experience of rock as frightening. The Hell's Angels, regarded by some (such as Ken Kesey)<sup>219</sup> as part of the counterculture, are shown preying on other members of their own "community." With the violence at Altamont becoming the main focus of attention for both the concert audience and the cinematic spectator, the music is portrayed as having lost its power to bring people together. Furthermore, rather than enhancing the communal experience, drugs are portrayed as magnifying the horror. After a member of the Hell's Angels had knocked out Jefferson Airplane member Marty Balin, the group's other lead vocalist Grace Slick is shown attempting to pacify the

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<sup>218</sup> See [www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com).

<sup>219</sup> Lee and Schlain, *Acid Dreams*, 125.

audience and saying “You’ve got to keep your bodies off each other unless you intend love,” but in the context of Altamont her words just seem like an empty slogan.

### **Sexual Freedom**

Another characteristic of the 1960s counterculture was a newfound openness about the body and sexual pleasure and a degree of experimentation with sex that paralleled its experimentation with drugs.<sup>220</sup> The so-called sexual “revolution” was largely a result of the birth control pill, first available in 1960, as well as the legalization of abortion in a number of American states.<sup>221</sup> The new sexual freedom was also accompanied by a new frankness about the body and as such represented an implicit rejection of the prudishness and hypocrisy of mainstream society. As with the counterculture’s experimentation with drugs, sexual freedom also had distinct political implications, carrying with it what Foss and Larkin have termed “an oppositional stance towards conventional culture and established social order.”<sup>222</sup> The new openness about sexual pleasure also challenged the combination of titillation and control within the dominant culture where sexual images often appeared in advertising and in magazines such as *Playboy*, yet the predominant message was one of puritanical moralizing.<sup>223</sup>

Both Janis Joplin and Jimi Hendrix’s performances in *Monterey Pop* recall the roots of rock in the sexualized rhythms of R&B. In her version of the Big Mama Thornton song “Ball and Chain,” Joplin’s performance builds gradually from an expression of intense

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<sup>220</sup> Morgan, *The 60s Experience*, 201.

<sup>221</sup> Isserman and Kazin, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s*, 152.

<sup>222</sup> Foss and Larkin, “From *The Gates of Eden* to *Day of the Locust*,” 49.

<sup>223</sup> Morgan, 202.

longing to a storming musical catharsis. As William Rothman has suggested, the repeated cuts work to emphasize the song's pulsing beat.<sup>224</sup> The shots are mainly from side-on, focusing on the singer's body twitching as the song builds and highlighting the frustrated sexuality of lines such as "Just because I got to need, need, need your love." In one respect, the film's footage of Joplin's performance of "Ball and Chain" recalls the counterculture's advocacy of sexual freedom for both men and women, but in another respect it is also ambivalent with regards to the need for love and approval. For while the emotional power of her performance as portrayed in the film at least partly transcends the song's lyrical persona, she is still positioned passively, as a victim waiting for her "daddy." By contrast, Jimi Hendrix's performance of "Wild Thing" in *Monterey Pop* is represented as far more aggressively sexual. There is no mistaking he is singing about sex and he transforms the coyness of lines such as "Wild thing, I think I love you" into something more suggestive. He also accentuates the sexual elements in the lyric by handling his guitar with a phallic theatricality, pressing it up against the speaker and rubbing his crotch on its body, then kneeling and rubbing it between his legs as if simulating masturbation before finally setting fire to the instrument. Although "Ball and Chain" and "Wild Thing" both have connotations of frustrated sexuality, Hendrix's performance appears more an expression of what Norma Coates has termed "rock masculinity."<sup>225</sup> The over-the-top visual spectacle quickly overshadows the song as if to suggest that it is merely a vehicle for the performer to enact a "rock god" persona,

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<sup>224</sup> Rothman, *Documentary Film Classics*, 200-201.

<sup>225</sup> Norma Coates, "(R)evolution Now?: Rock and the Political Potential of Gender," in *Sexing the Groove*, ed. Sheila Whiteley (London: Routledge, 1997), 50.

something that would become increasingly common among male rock performers in the subsequent decade.

Although several of the live performances documented in *Woodstock* exhibit a similar degree of intensity, none demonstrates such uninhibited sexuality as Hendrix. Instead the film addresses the subject of sexual freedom more through its focus on the festival audience. The film's most in-depth interview presents two young audience members as exemplifying the new sexual freedom: perhaps the most-widely publicized aspect of the counterculture in the mainstream media. We learn that they live communally and have travelled to the festival together but they are not "going together" and won't necessarily be together throughout the festival. The interview reflects *Woodstock's* attempt to present a diversity of views, and their answers appear at least partly in response to the earlier comment from a man from the town who angrily suggests that he wouldn't allow his daughter to go to such a festival. Several scenes in *Woodstock* refer to the counterculture desire to get back to nature, with the body portrayed on the side of "nature" in scenes of audience members skinny-dipping in the nearby lake and frolicking in the mud after the rain. Such footage not only emphasizes the festival-goers' lack of inhibitions, but also presents them as rejecting the mainstream disciplining of the body through body-cleaning products, modes of dress, hairstyles etc. Yet, while *Woodstock* attempts to document the many different aspects of the festival, it tends to focus more on images that conform to mainstream media stereotypes of the counterculture, in shots of young people swimming naked and smoking marijuana and in its interviews with audience members on topics such as the generation gap, drugs and free love. In fact, the film's audience footage also

reveals that a majority of the festival goers are in fact “mainstream” Americans who will go back to their jobs and classrooms when the festival is over.

While *Woodstock* focuses on the festival audience in documenting what was allegedly a new sexual freedom for both male and female participants, *Gimme Shelter* presents an aggressive masculine sexuality in its live performance scenes. The Rolling Stones’ “bad boy” persona was already well established in the popular media, dating back to the controversy around the lyrical connotations of early songs such as “Let’s Spend the Night Together.” The song was initially banned from the Ed Sullivan television show in 1967 then the offending words censored to become “Let’s spend some time together” during the group’s onscreen performance.<sup>226</sup> Furthermore, while the Rolling Stones’ most famous song “Satisfaction” also attacks the banality of the contemporary media, it is mainly known for its hook-line that suggests a desire for sexual satisfaction and, as Todd Gitlin has pointed out, the delayed orgasm of the line “And I try, and I try, and I try.”<sup>227</sup> The extended live version of the song in *Gimme Shelter* emphasizes the sexual aspect of the lyrics, with Jagger ad-libbing lines such as “I need a good woman to keep me satisfied.” Throughout the film’s tour concert footage the Rolling Stones’ singer is portrayed as a strutting “sex god.” There is an air of titillation about much of the depicted media coverage and at a press conference a female reporter is shown asking him whether he is “satisfied.” When Jagger suggests that he has “busted a button” on his trousers, the camera focuses solely on the reaction of female members of the concert audience. In its live performance footage, *Gimme Shelter* presents a distinct power differential between

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<sup>226</sup> See [www.songfacts.com/detail](http://www.songfacts.com/detail)

<sup>227</sup> Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*, 199.

the celebrity performer and the audience, with female audience members mainly singled out by the filmmaker's camera. Lastly, while the relationship between audience and performer changes during the Altamont performance, the concert is still situated within the wider context of a Rolling Stones' American tour in which Jagger is presented as a rock star, again foreshadowing the dominant construction of the male rock performer in the 1970s, providing a license for greater sexual and drug-induced excess.

### **The Politics of Gender**

During the second half of the 1960s women were becoming increasingly disillusioned with their lack of any real influence within the New Left political movements and even more with their subservient position within the counterculture. As Todd Gitlin has observed, the counterculture's ideal for women was "the earth mother," with women expected "to step off their pedestals, take off their bras, put on long dresses and bake bread."<sup>228</sup> *Woodstock's* suggestion that we need to get "back to the garden"<sup>229</sup> appears to reflect a similar definition of gender roles. Early scenes in the film show men driving farm machinery while the women tend the children. Even the representations of hippies riding horses show the men always taking the reins, thus serving as a reminder that a woman's place within the 1960s counterculture was not dissimilar to a woman's place in the dominant culture of the time. In fact, communal living often simply reinforced traditional gender roles, with women more involved than men in much of the essential day-to-day work, such as preparing food, looking after children and planting and

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<sup>228</sup> Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*, 372.

<sup>229</sup> The phrase is from the lyrics of *Woodstock's* title song, written by Joni Mitchell and performed by Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young on the film's soundtrack.

harvesting crops, with the absence of labour-saving household appliances such as electric ovens and washing machines making their work far more physically demanding than that of the average housewife.

Throughout the festival rockumentaries women are more associated with nature than men. As such, they are often singled out to represent the counterculture's shedding of inhibitions, with the camera focusing on female dancers in the festival audiences, reacting to the (mainly male) onstage performers. In one scene in *Woodstock*, the filmmaker interviews a woman swimming naked in the lake, although neither questions nor answers appear to have any real significance, implying that the "interview" was more for the purposes of audience titillation. In the early tour concert scenes of *Gimme Shelter* the filmmaker's camera singles out female fans from what appears to be a predominantly male audience; they are shown in the front rows reaching out in the direction of Mick Jagger and as the film goes on trying to climb onstage in order to touch him. Later, in *Gimme Shelter's* Altamont scenes, the camera once again singles out individual women in the concert audience, but this time to reveal frightened faces in reaction to the Hell's Angels' display of aggressive masculinity.

At one point in *Gimme Shelter*, Jagger makes the throwaway comment "nice to have a chick occasionally," following a replay in the editing suite of footage of Tina Turner's powerful and explicit performance of the song "I've Been Loving You Too Long (To Stop Now)" during Ike and Tina Turner's support slot on the Rolling Stones' tour. On the one hand, there is a hint of personal jealousy in Jagger's comment, with her performance

of a slow blues song appearing more effective than his own on the earlier “Love in Vain.” On the other hand, the casual sexism inherent in his remark reflects the position of women, not only within 1960s rock music, but also within contemporary society. With Turner’s aggressively sexualized performance transgressing the limited range of personae available to female performers in 1960s rock, Jagger’s remark suggests an underlying tone of disapproval. Furthermore, her performance in *Gimme Shelter* is followed by footage of the Rolling Stones playing “Honky Tonk Woman,” as if appealing for a return to safer ground. In this song Jagger boasts of his sexual encounters with “a gin-soaked bar-room queen” and “a divorcee in New York City,” thereby returning to his familiar swaggering, macho persona. Songs such as “Honky Tonk Woman” and especially the misogynistic “Under My Thumb,” which the Rolling Stones played at Altamont as Meredith Hunter was murdered, serve as a reminder that the position of women within rock music and the rockumentaries largely reflected the subservient role of women both within contemporary society and within the counterculture itself. Ultimately, women’s dissatisfaction with that role was one of the main factors that led to the emergence of the feminist movement in the late 1960s, their increasing radicalization paralleling that of African-Americans over the same period.

### **The Politics of Ethnicity**

The lack of alternatives for women within the 1960s counterculture paralleled the alienation felt by African-Americans who were also largely excluded from the counterculture and from the utopian carnivals of *Monterey Pop* and *Woodstock*. The civil rights struggle had dragged on throughout much of the 1960s, but young black people,

especially, were impatient at the lack of progress made through non-violent means and this led to the emergence of the more assertive Black Power movement. The rise of Black Power within the civil rights movement was as much the product of generational as racial conflict, rejecting the integrationalist vision of older established black leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr.<sup>230</sup> From the time of the riots in the Watts area of Los Angeles in August 1965, increasingly violent confrontations erupted periodically on the streets of major American cities between African-Americans and police, National Guardsmen, and the U.S. Army.<sup>231</sup> Such “riots” or “rebellions”<sup>232</sup> were largely a result of institutional racism, contributing to long-standing social inequities such as inadequate housing, poor schools, high unemployment and growing drug abuse. They were also a result of raised expectations for a promised better standard of living that many years later still remained unfulfilled.<sup>233</sup>

Despite the fact that 1967, the year of the Summer of Love, also saw massive race riots on the streets of Detroit and Newark,<sup>234</sup> there is very little direct mention of contemporary racial politics in *Monterey Pop*. Early in the film, the Monterey Police Chief is portrayed expressing the fear that the militant African-American group the Black Panthers may turn up at the festival. He uses those fears as a justification for a substantial police presence, in a reflection of mainstream media paranoia about the Panthers and

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<sup>230</sup> Isserman and Kazin, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s*, 176.

<sup>231</sup> In July, 1967 47,000 U.S. Army paratroopers occupied the Detroit ghetto. See Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*, 244.

<sup>232</sup> Gitlin, 168.

<sup>233</sup> Isserman and Kazin, 140.

<sup>234</sup> Morgan, *The 60s Experience*, 151.

their armed “revolutionary” ethos.<sup>235</sup> Similarly, although race certainly provides a sub-text for Jimi Hendrix’s deconstruction of the American national anthem in the film’s final live performance, there are few direct mentions of contemporary racial politics in *Woodstock*. In his anti-war song “Handsome Johnny,” Richie Havens refers to “the Birmingham War,” alluding to the civil rights protests against segregation that took place earlier in the decade in Birmingham, Alabama.<sup>236</sup> However, the film’s only other overt reference comes in Joan Baez’ performance of Gram Parsons’ “Drug Store Truck Drivin’ Man” which tells the story of an average American who is also “a head of the Ku Klux Klan.” However, the song’s references to racism are confined to a small town in the South, far removed from the lives of the majority of the festival audience. Racial politics are brought more to the fore in *Gimme Shelter*. In the Altamont footage there is a shot of a young, well-dressed white woman collecting money (from two young black men) for the Panther Defense Fund. Although they appear to be a small minority in the Altamont audience, the film singles out the few African-Americans present as if to suggest that one of them might be the murder victim, Meredith Hunter, with the cinematic spectator already knowing his identity. The fact that Hunter was a black man killed by Hell’s Angels is significant, with the Angels an all-white paramilitary organization, already known for their open racism.

The absence of any direct acknowledgement of contemporary racial politics in the rockumentaries both reflects, and is reflected in, the scarcity of black performers at the

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<sup>235</sup> Isserman and Kazin, 178.

<sup>236</sup> Glenn T. Eskew, *But for Birmingham: The Local and National Movements in the Civil Rights Struggle* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 3-6.

festivals, as well as the overwhelmingly white festival audiences. In fact, the 1960s rock festivals were very much white counterculture carnivals at a time when black music was going through its most intensely political phase, as witnessed by songs such as James Brown's "Say It Loud (I'm Black and I'm Proud)," Edwin Starr's "War," Gil Scott Heron's "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised" and Marvin Gaye's "What's Going On" and "Inner City Blues." Nevertheless, with African-American blues and R&B among the strongest influences on 1960s rock music, the few black performers who are included in the rockumentaries, for example Otis Redding in *Monterey Pop* or Ike and Tina Turner in *Gimme Shelter*, provide a token acknowledgement of rock's roots.<sup>237</sup> While any coalition between the white counterculture and radical black movements remained merely a romantic ideal, existing more in theory than in practice, the multi-ethnic groups in *Monterey Pop* and *Woodstock* also play an important part in both films' constructed aura of countercultural interracial solidarity. Sly and the Family Stone, for example, included both black and white (and male and female) members and had a huge hit the previous year with the upbeat, utopian "Everyday People," a song preaching racial equality. *Woodstock* shows them involving the audience during "I Want to Take You Higher," with the echoing chorus chant of "higher" an ironic play on the call-and-response tradition of a black church service.<sup>238</sup> Yet a year after *Woodstock* the group released the depressed and disillusioned "There's a Riot Going On" album, its tone perhaps a more accurate reflection of racial politics in the U.S. throughout this whole period.

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<sup>237</sup> According to Marianne Faithfull, Mick Jagger's own performance style was closely modeled on Turner's. See Whiteley, *Sexing the Groove*, 76.

<sup>238</sup> Pete Fornatale, *Back to the Garden: The Story of Woodstock and How It Changed a Generation* (New York: Touchstone Books, 2009), 173.

Lastly, while contemporary racial politics are largely absent from *Monterey Pop*, the Indian sitar player Ravi Shankar and his group are depicted in the film as the exotic “other,” embraced into the counterculture consciousness as older, wiser and more spiritual.<sup>239</sup> Indian culture and religion were widely romanticized within the counterculture and Shankar’s inclusion in the film recalls the interest in the exploration of non-Western spiritualities, both as part of its rejection of materialism and its search for higher states of consciousness”<sup>240</sup> The presentation of Shankar’s performance emphasizes the trance-like qualities of the music, with the camera traversing the festival audience who are shown standing completely still, as if in meditation. Gradually the camera moves from the audience to the onstage performers and the music eventually concludes with Shankar bowing to the audience and showering them with flowers in a gesture of humility. The placement of his performance at the end of *Monterey Pop* can be seen as perhaps the ultimate act of inclusiveness, symbolizing the coming together not only of people within the United States but also of different races and cultures from around the world.<sup>241</sup> In one respect, the scene suggests an appropriation of essentialized ethnic characteristics, with the American counterculture embracing Indian mysticism. In another respect, it implies a level of self-congratulation, with the montage of applauding hands implying that the audience are actually applauding themselves for their increased level of consciousness. The self-righteous tendencies of the 1960s counterculture are best captured in the words of (Monterey performers) the Buffalo Springfield’s “For What It’s Worth,” “Singing songs and carrying signs. Mostly say, hooray for our side.”

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<sup>239</sup> Kitts, “Documenting, Creating, and Interpreting Moments of Definition,” 717.

<sup>240</sup> Foss and Larkin, “From *The Gates of Eden* to *Day of the Locust*,” 49, Morgan, *The 60s Experience*, 171.

<sup>241</sup> Kitts, 717.

### The Vietnam War

The Vietnam War was the political issue that most effectively united the different strands of the counterculture. Yet, while it provides a constant backdrop for all the late 1960s festival rockumentaries, it only receives direct mention in *Woodstock*. It is all but absent from *Monterey Pop*, despite the fact that the Monterey festival took place at a time when the war was fast escalating, as were the anti-war protests at home, with over 100,000 people marching in protest in both New York and San Francisco in April of that year.<sup>242</sup> While *Monterey Pop*'s focus on both audience and performers provides a considerable amount of ethnographic information about the social context of the time, there are only fleeting indications of the wider political context. There is a brief shot of "Ban the Bomb" posters for sale in one of booths at the accompanying fair, indirectly serving as a reminder that Cold War politics remained the chief justification given by the United States government for its continued involvement in Vietnam. In addition, while Joe MacDonald, a singer/guitarist with Country Joe and the Fish, is shown wearing what appears to be a military hardhat, he also has flowers painted on his face, a reminder of the often-repeated counterculture slogan "make love not war." In fact Country Joe and the Fish played the only explicitly political songs at the Monterey festival, "The Bomb Song" (with its "Don't drop that h-bomb on me" refrain) and "The-Feel-Like-I'm-Fixin'-To-Die-Rag." The fact that neither was included in the final cut of the film perhaps suggests a concern that such political messages may have alienated a broader audience interested in the drug use and the sexual liberation but wary of political activism.

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<sup>242</sup> Morgan, *The 60s Experience*, 149.

By contrast, *Woodstock* never escapes the Vietnam War. Lines from the film's title song, such as "And I dreamed I saw the bombers. Riding shotgun in the sky. Turning into butterflies" evoke images from the war, along with starkly contrasting images of peace. The war is alluded to in shots of U.S. Army helicopters transporting sick and injured audience members away from the festival site. In those shots the festival comes to represent a battlefield, bringing to mind the slogan "Bring the war home," adopted by the late 1960s radical political group the Weathermen.<sup>243</sup> Mostly in *Woodstock*, however, the Vietnam War is positioned as a target of common opposition for the audience and the film's constructed "Woodstock nation."<sup>244</sup> It is mentioned directly in Richie Havens' "Handsome Johnny," Country Joe MacDonald's scathing "The-Feel-Like-I'm-Fixin'-To-Die-Rag," and in Joan Baez' comments from the stage referring to her husband David Harris's imprisonment for resisting the draft. Baez' remarks are augmented on the visual track by still photographs of her and Harris together, providing another intertextual reference and dialoguing with the music as it briefly moves beyond the diegesis. The war is also mentioned in the interview conducted by the filmmakers with the young audience member who, when asked about President Nixon and General Westmoreland (the commander of the United States forces in Vietnam), responds that they are "neurotic or psychotic" and that he "doesn't need all that power." While he too is against the war, his comments reflect the continuing tension within the 1960s counterculture between those who advocated the transformation of self as the first step towards any wider social change and those in favour of collective political solutions.

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<sup>243</sup> Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*, 392.

<sup>244</sup> The term was first used in Allen Ginsberg, *Woodstock Nation: a Talk-Rock Album* (New York Vintage Books, 1969).

Yet *Woodstock*'s most powerful documented protest against the Vietnam War is the performance by ex-paratrooper Jimi Hendrix, on the final morning of the festival and which coincides with footage of what's left of the audience wallowing in the mud and the rubbish. The field resembles a war zone, with the audience appearing as refugees of a defeated army, in relation to which Hendrix seems depressed and dissociated. He plays an instrumental version of the American national anthem, a tune originally composed during the 1812 war against the British<sup>245</sup> and undoubtedly familiar to the vast majority of the audience. Yet, its performance here evokes the current war in its employment of guitar feedback effects that evoke the sounds of aircraft diving and bombs exploding. In this context the line "the rockets' red glare" suggests a very different kind of rocket from that described in the original song, in the film reflected in sound rather than words.<sup>246</sup> Hendrix's performance is also symbolic of the fact that, on the one hand, blacks were the most exploited segment of the US population relative to the war effort, but, on the other hand, they had the least power and representation within the society for which they fought.<sup>247</sup> As a result, Hendrix's distortion of the American national anthem could be interpreted as a filtering of its original harmonies through the dissonance of war and the black experience.

As with *Monterey Pop*, the Vietnam War is never mentioned directly in *Gimme Shelter*.

Nevertheless, the events at the Altamont Speedway are played out against the backdrop

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<sup>245</sup> Whiteley, "Music, Meaning and the Star Spangled Banner," 23.

<sup>246</sup> Whiteley, 25.

<sup>247</sup> Black GIs represented 2 percent of the officers in Vietnam and were assigned 28 percent of the combat missions. See Charles Shaar-Murray, *Crosstown Traffic: Jimi Hendrix and Post-War Pop* (London: Faber and Faber), 23.

of the war. With the helicopter such a familiar presence in reports from Vietnam, the helicopter footage of the Altamont site resembles news footage from the war. Shots of medics on the ground struggling to treat the casualties in the audience and requests from the stage for “bandages, gauze, and sponges” also recall news images from the war. In the end, *Gimme Shelter* represents the mood of the Altamont concert as reflecting the sense of frustration and disillusionment that overwhelmed the counterculture at the end of the decade as the war seemed to grind on with no end in sight despite all the protests and political opposition. In this respect, it portrays the counterculture at a point of crisis, unable to imagine an escape from the climate of violence in contemporary American society, a society that it had sought so desperately to transform. Moreover, *Gimme Shelter* reflects the cruel irony that the violence that overtook the counterculture came not only from without, in the form of almost daily body-counts from the war and in atrocities perpetrated against civilians, such as the My Lai massacre,<sup>248</sup> but also from within the counterculture itself, in the form of the drug-fuelled Manson family murders and the increasingly violent confrontations on the streets of American cities between anti-war protestors and police.

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<sup>248</sup> When American soldiers murdered 347 Vietnamese civilians. See Isserman and Kazin, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s*, 224.

## Chapter Five

### The Rockumentaries and the Media

*Monterey Pop* (1968), *Woodstock* (1970), and *Gimme Shelter* (1970)<sup>249</sup> can be seen as part of an increasingly media-saturated environment that existed in the United States in the late 1960s, with a broadening media sphere and the dimensions of the social world increasingly defined by the media. The main news stories of the era, such as the living room version of the Vietnam War, were transmitted on television and beamed nightly into the private living rooms of the vast majority of middle-class Americans. In fact, television coverage transformed the course of the war, with footage from the front line contradicting the official version of events and influencing the tide of public opinion to turn against the United States government. Television also changed the course of the counterculture, selectively covering only what were seen as the more “newsworthy” stories, promoting the more colourful spokespeople as media celebrities and focusing on the violence of anti-war demonstrations. At the same time, there were almost daily body counts from the war, stories of political assassinations and violent confrontations on American streets and university campuses, as well as lurid accounts of gruesome murders such as those committed by the Manson “family.” Furthermore, there were also news reports detailing the dire conditions existing in many major American cities, with ever-worsening environmental conditions, widespread drug abuse, and rising crime

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<sup>249</sup> *Monterey Pop* (D. A. Pennebaker, USA, 1968), *Woodstock* (Michael Wadleigh, USA, 1970), *Gimme Shelter* (Albert Maysles, David Maysles and Charlotte Zwerin, USA, 1970).

statistics.<sup>250</sup> This sensational media environment also led to a blurring of the lines between the news and entertainment medias and an increasing movement into the realm of what Douglas Kellner has termed the “media spectacle.”<sup>251</sup>

### **The Media as a Documentary Subject**

In much the same way as earlier direct cinema documentaries such as *Primary* and *Happy Mother's Day*,<sup>252</sup> the festival rockumentaries employ footage of the mainstream media to provide some context for the viewers. This communicates a sense of the wider media coverage of the festivals, and, as in earlier direct cinema documentaries that also focused on celebrities and earlier rockumentaries such as *Don't Look Back*,<sup>253</sup> the media also becomes a subject of the films. *Monterey Pop* includes footage of an interview with the local Monterey Police Chief who is shown justifying the size of the police presence at the festival, as well as the fact that they are dressed in riot gear. Although the interview questions are excerpted, he suggests the potential for violence if both the Hell's Angels and the Black Panthers were to attend, his remarks providing a brief glimpse of the wider media context of the Monterey festival, reflecting contemporary mainstream media-generated paranoia about the spread of racial warfare from the black inner-city ghettos into the comfortable white suburbs. However, with the peaceful unfolding of the event and footage in the film showing nothing but friendly interactions between police and

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<sup>250</sup> Barbara Klinger, “The Road to Dystopia: Landscaping the Nation,” in *The Road Movie Book*, eds. Steven Cohan and Ira Hark (London: Routledge), 193.

<sup>251</sup> Douglas Kellner, *Media Spectacle* (London: Routledge, 2003), 1-2.

<sup>252</sup> *Primary* (Robert Drew, USA, 1960), *Happy Mother's Day* (Richard Leacock and Joyce Chopra, USA, 1963).

<sup>253</sup> *Don't Look Back* (D. A. Pennebaker, USA, 1966).

audience, his views are made to look paranoid. In fact, while the Black Panthers appear to be absent from the festival, the film does single out the few Hell's Angels who did attend and portrays them as very much part of the festival audience, their manner unobtrusive and their body language relaxed, in contrast to their presentation and behaviour in *Gimme Shelter*.

The media also becomes one of the main subjects of *Woodstock*. Audience members, organizers, and performers alike, all comment on mainstream media reports on the size of the festival audience and the extent of the disruption caused. At one stage in the film, the festival MC Chip Monck can be heard recounting daily newspaper headlines such as "Traffic Uptight at Hippie Fest" over the PA, while at the same time the camera traverses the audience as if to suggest a very different mood. *Woodstock* performer Arlo Guthrie comments (with some exaggeration) from the stage that, "There's supposed to be a million and a half people here tonight," adding in apparent reference to media reports that "The New York State thru-way is closed." Later in the film a resident of the nearby town mentions that the surrounding region has been declared "a disaster area." Media reports about the festival therefore feed back into both the participants' and the audience's perception of the event itself, almost in real time. It is this phenomenon that causes the event to become part of the "media spectacle,"<sup>254</sup> where the mediation of the event becomes part of the event itself and as a result heightening its intensity. As John Sebastian remarks from the stage "The media can only say bad things, unless there ain't no fuck-ups." His statement implies that the performers and audience were behaving as if

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<sup>254</sup> Kellner, *Media Spectacle*, 2.

they knew they were being watched by the mass media, with surveillance just another aspect of the spectacle. Ultimately, *Woodstock* uses media reports on the sheer size of the festival audience as evidence that the counterculture is a force that cannot be ignored. Furthermore, the film's depiction of the festival as "Three Days of Peace and Music" acts as an implicit commentary on the mainstream media's frequent representation of anti-war demonstrations as inevitably violent, against a backdrop of infinitely greater state violence in the long-running Vietnam War.

*Gimme Shelter* employs footage and recordings from the mainstream media in order to contextualize the events that it depicts at the Altamont concert. Through shots in the film of a radio DJ talking on the air we learn that Altamont has been confirmed as the location for the Rolling Stones' end-of-tour free concert. In addition, the media is used to establish the central issue of the film, the question of responsibility for Meredith Hunter's murder. Radio recordings form a significant part of the first editing suite scene, where the Rolling Stones' members Mick Jagger and Charlie Watts are shown listening to replays of the radio news and a talkback show from the day after Altamont. We hear the talkback host inviting listeners to ring in and provide first-hand accounts of the concert. We then hear a recording of California Hell's Angels' leader Sonny Barger giving his version of what happened, suggesting that Mick Jagger and not the Angels must bear sole responsibility for the events that occurred. As Barger makes his claim, the camera moves in to focus on both Jagger's and Watts' reactions in close-up. The scene establishes a tension that continues throughout *Gimme Shelter*, one reminiscent of many thrillers and horror genre films where the cinematic spectator knows more than the onscreen characters. As

spectators we already know the full details of Meredith Hunter's murder and therefore we have privileged knowledge compared to the performers we see onscreen. It prefigures the second editing suite scene in which the camera focuses exclusively on Jagger, even though all five members of the Rolling Stones are presumably present. That scene also makes use of unnamed intertextual references from a variety of other media, with footage of the murder replayed as the camera focuses on Jagger's face. As such, it resembles a courtroom investigation, although with the questions never actually asked onscreen but instead implied from questions that would be asked in the weeks and months following the Altamont concert.

### **The Media-Saturated Environment**

*Monterey Pop* presents the Monterey festival as part of the media-constructed "Summer of Love." The idea of the Summer of Love arose largely as a result of the media hype surrounding the first Human Be-In, held at the beginning of 1967 in Golden Gate Park in the Haight-Ashbury area of San Francisco. From its very inception, the Human Be-In was intended as a media event, with the organizers not only using the underground media, but also the mainstream media to promote the festival.<sup>255</sup> For the mainstream media, such events proved a readily available source of colourful and exotic images and this led them to focus on the various countercultural communities scattered around the country, with Haight-Ashbury being the best known. A throwaway comment by a member of local anarchist group The Diggers about a possible hippie "invasion" of San Francisco was

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<sup>255</sup> Lee and Schlain, *Acid Dreams: the Complete Social History of LSD: the CIA, the Sixties, and Beyond* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1985), 194.

taken up by the city's press.<sup>256</sup> The *San Francisco Chronicle* newspaper featured a headline that screamed "Huge Invasion" and "Hippies Warn San Francisco."<sup>257</sup> The stories in the mainstream media had the effect of amplifying and transforming the very phenomenon it was claiming to report, thereby taking it into the realm of media spectacle, and largely as a result of such coverage approximately seventy-five thousand young people from all over the country descended on the Haight-Ashbury area of the city during the summer of 1967.<sup>258</sup>

Initially, much of the media hype around the Summer of Love came from what Todd Gitlin has described as the "countercultural entrepreneurs" who were involved in promoting music events, and selling drugs, records, books and underground newspapers to the counterculture.<sup>259</sup> At the time, the underground media were becoming increasingly influential and also increasingly profitable, as evidenced by the fact that by 1967 the San Francisco "psychedelic newspaper" the *Oracle* had a nationwide circulation of around one hundred thousand people.<sup>260</sup> For their part, the mainstream media alternated between expressing disgust at the hippies and regarding them as a source of outlandish images. At the same time the media industries also realized that there was money to be made out of the counterculture, with the major music labels moving quickly to sign a number of the San Francisco acid-rock groups such as the Jefferson Airplane (RCA), the Quicksilver Messenger Service (Capitol), Moby Grape (Columbia) and even the anti-commercial

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<sup>256</sup> Lee and Schlain, *Acid Dreams*, 177.

<sup>257</sup> Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope: Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1987), 225.

<sup>258</sup> Gitlin, 215.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>260</sup> Lee and Schlain, 148, 185.

Grateful Dead (Warner Brothers). Independent movie studios, such as Roger Corman's American International Pictures also moved to cash in with hippie "exploitation" films such as *The Trip* (1967) and *Psych-Out* (1968).<sup>261</sup> This increasingly media-saturated environment also extended to New Hollywood fiction films such as *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) and network television documentaries such as *The Hippie Temptation* (1968), as well as *Monterey Pop* itself.<sup>262</sup>

From the studio version of Scott Mackenzie's "San Francisco" on the soundtrack early in the film, with the line "Summertime will be a lovin' there," *Monterey Pop* mirrors the media image of the Summer of Love. The song, which had already sold over five million copies in the United States alone,<sup>263</sup> establishes the location of the festival as the semi-mythical San Francisco. Lyric lines such as "If you're going to San Francisco be sure to wear a flower in your hair" along with shots of planes flying overhead (as if going to San Francisco) perpetuate that image, as do shots of women in the audience wearing flowers in their hair. The first scene in the film features a young woman describing the festival as a "love-in," the sign on the front of the stage reads "Peace, Love, and Flowers," and we also witness soul singer Otis Redding addressing the audience from the stage as "the Love Generation." Yet, in reality, the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco had become far from a paradise during the Summer of Love, being increasingly overrun by

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<sup>261</sup> *The Trip* (Roger Corman, USA, 1968), *Psych-Out* (Richard Rush, USA, 1968).

<sup>262</sup> *The Hippie Temptation* (CBS Television Documentary, USA, 1968), *Bonnie and Clyde* (Arthur Penn, USA, 1967).

<sup>263</sup> Sheila Whiteley, *The Space Between the Notes: Rock and the Counterculture* (London: Routledge, 1992), 63.

what Lee and Schlain have described as the “casualties” of that same Love Generation.<sup>264</sup> Speed and heroin had begun to replace LSD, there was a dramatic increase in violent crime in the area, there was widespread malnutrition, as well as a rapid spread of infectious diseases such as hepatitis and STDs.<sup>265</sup> Furthermore, national news media coverage during the summer of 1967 was also characterized by a procession of even more starkly contrasting images, such as the summertime riots in the black inner-city ghettos of Detroit and Newark and the further escalation of the Vietnam War.<sup>266</sup>

In *Woodstock*, folk singer Richie Havens is shown acknowledging the power of the media from the stage, saying “It’s all about you and the people who are going to read about you tomorrow.” The film reflects a time in the late 1960s when the underground media were becoming part of the commercial marketplace and the news and entertainment medias were becoming increasingly interconnected. The Woodstock festival not only received coverage in underground magazines such as the *Village Voice* and *Rolling Stone*, but also on the national television news, in daily newspapers such as the *New York Times*, and in mainstream news magazines such as *Time* and *Newsweek*.<sup>267</sup> In fact, some mainstream media outlets were forced to change their attitude to the festival when they realized its significance, as seen in the changed stance of *New York Times* editorials on successive days, the first editorial denouncing the disruption caused by the festival and the second

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<sup>264</sup> Lee and Schlain, *Acid Dreams*, 179.

<sup>265</sup> Lee and Schlain, 186.

<sup>266</sup> Edward P. Morgan, *The 60s Experience: Hard Lessons about Modern America*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), xx.

<sup>267</sup> Simon Warner, “Reporting Woodstock: Some Contemporary Press Reflections on the Festival,” in *Remembering Woodstock*, ed. Andy Bennett (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), 53. Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope. Days of Rage*, 406.

praising the behaviour of the young people involved.<sup>268</sup> With *Woodstock* released by Warner Brothers, one of the major Hollywood film studios, and the film's soundtrack album released (as a triple LP) on Atlantic, one of the major music labels, both had access to mainstream distribution networks. Together, the film and the soundtrack album represented an early example of what became known as "cross-media promotion," with each achieving commercial success in its own right and thereby functioning as promotion for the other.<sup>269</sup> In addition, both the soundtrack album, repackaged on CD, and the film, repackaged and released first on video and then on DVD, permitted a continued reliving of the live event in different contexts across a variety of different media and over several subsequent generations.<sup>270</sup>

Thomas Kitts has written of the "reflexive dimension" of *Gimme Shelter*, that it is essentially a film within a film.<sup>271</sup> The fact that the cinematic spectator's prior knowledge of the events at Altamont comes from other media, that Meredith Hunter's murder was captured on film, and that its examination becomes the subject of another media event, a documentary, is expressive of the media-saturated environment of the era. It is also a reminder that the late 1960s represented a much changed media environment from that of

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<sup>268</sup> "Nightmare in the Catskills," *New York Times*, August 18, 1969 and "Morning After at Bethel," *New York Times*, August 19, 1969 quoted in Pete Fornatale, *Back to the Garden: The Story of Woodstock and How it Changed a Generation* (New York: Touchstone Books, 2009), xxi-xxii.

<sup>269</sup> Jeff Smith, *The Sounds of Commerce: Marketing Popular Film Music* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 197.

<sup>270</sup> Dave Laing, "The Three Woodstocks and the Live Music Scene," in *Remembering Woodstock*, ed. Andy Bennett (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), 14.

<sup>271</sup> Thomas M. Kitts, "Documenting, Creating, and Interpreting Moments of Definition: *Monterey Pop, Woodstock and Gimme Shelter*." *The Journal of Popular Culture* 43, no.4 (2009), 720.

direct cinema documentaries such as *Primary* from much earlier in the decade, where the celebrity subjects could be presented backstage in what appeared to be an extension of the everyday. The events at the Rolling Stones' Altamont concert not only attracted the attention of the entertainment media, but they also became news. This was an era when the divisions between journalism and entertainment were becoming increasingly blurred, an era characterized by what Gitlin has described as "the commodity process of news, fashion, and image."<sup>272</sup> From the beginning *Gimme Shelter* portrays the concert as a cross-platform media event, with shots of a radio DJ promoting it on the air and of the organizers answering questions about it at a press conference. At one stage we see Mick Jagger being interviewed by a female reporter who asks if he is "satisfied," in reference to the title of the Rolling Stones' most well-known song "Satisfaction." Her question reflects the sycophantic tone of much of the focus on celebrities and highlights the symbiotic relationship that exists between the entertainment industry and the media. It also reinforces the fact that the main purpose of such media coverage is the promotion of the featured act and the upcoming event. The fact that *Gimme Shelter* also includes footage of the Rolling Stones in the Muscle Shoals Sound Studios listening to mixes of their latest recordings serves as a reminder that such tours are generally driven by a desire to promote a band's latest album. In this case, the free concert right at the end of the group's American tour represented an attempt by their management to counter the dissatisfaction that had been expressed in the media over the high price of tickets for the other shows.<sup>273</sup> Somewhat ironically in retrospect, Altamont

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<sup>272</sup> Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 238.

<sup>273</sup> Kitts, "Documenting, Creating, and Interpreting Moments of Definition," 720.

was seen as an opportunity to re-establish the Rolling Stones' tarnished media image, their countercultural affiliations regarded as being necessary to sell records and to sell out shows.

### **The Rockumentaries and the News Media**

As mentioned in chapter three, *Woodstock* contains numerous references to the Vietnam War and shots that recall familiar news images from the war, for example the scenes of army helicopters ferrying the sick and injured away from the festival site. The film also makes reference to other contemporary news stories, for example a woman interviewed by the filmmakers while waiting in a queue to ring her parents remarks that they "are terrified that the festival is going to be like another Chicago and I'm going to get my head beaten in." She is referring to the 1968 Democrat Party National Convention in Chicago when the Chicago police not only brutally attacked anti-war demonstrators, but also bystanders and representatives of the news media, the entire "riot" captured in vivid detail in television news footage, while the demonstrators chanted, "The whole world is watching! The whole world is watching!"<sup>274</sup> Even as the police attacked, they displayed awareness that the social meaning and reception of events cannot be separated from their mass mediation. In this respect, their chant appears particularly relevant to the age of television, with the resulting media spectacle literally able to be seen all around the world.

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<sup>274</sup> Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching*, 187.

At one point in *Woodstock*, the festival MC proudly announces that “this is the second largest city in New York” and shots of the stage at night do in fact resemble a city skyline with huge scaffolding and criss-crossing overhead wires. Elsewhere in the film one of the festival organizers is shown saying “Where there’s people there’s garbage. You can’t stop progress,” a statement that may be ironical but appears more as an excuse, albeit one at odds with *Woodstock’s* back-to-nature ethos. His statement does however reflect the many contradictions of a festival where the latest electronic technology is used to deliver the music, some of which contains messages about going back to nature, to an audience living in conditions with only the most basic amenities but who drove themselves to the event in cars. The contradictions also extend to the fact that *Woodstock* uses the latest film technology to portray the audience returning to nature in the mud and the rubbish, with those images subsequently reproduced in comfortable suburban movie theatres in cities all around the world. Nevertheless, the film’s depiction of the festival site as a self-contained city largely built on utopian ideals must also be viewed in relation to stories in the contemporary news media about America’s actual cities, with a number of articles at the time focusing on their decline, highlighting the disastrous impact of technology on the environment, the spread of pollution and crime, and the dangers of their highways.<sup>275</sup>

In *Gimme Shelter* the cinematic spectator witnesses the events at Altamont through a series of replays on a video monitor in the filmmaker’s editing suite. The slow motion analysis and repeated replays foreshadow subsequently released documentary footage of

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<sup>275</sup> Klinger, “The Road To Dystopia,” 197.

the assassination of US President John F. Kennedy.<sup>276</sup> In the editing suite the film is slowed down to an even closer frame-by-frame rate and rewound and replayed as if trying to find the critical piece of information that will solve the mystery of what happened. Another scene in *Gimme Shelter* shows the Rolling Stones and their entourage frantically crowding into the helicopter to “escape” from Altamont, foreshadowing later news footage of Americans escaping after the fall of Saigon to the North Vietnamese in 1975.<sup>277</sup> As mentioned in chapter four, the helicopter footage of the Altamont site and the audience arriving for the concert is also reminiscent of contemporary television news footage from the Vietnam War, with the helicopter such a ubiquitous presence in media coverage of the war. In addition, *Gimme Shelter’s* final scene depicts the remnants of the concert audience, many wrapped in blankets, trudging wearily across the fields away from the Altamont site. Rather than people who have just enjoyed a musical concert, they resemble a group of shocked and depressed young people after the Kent State shootings or even refugees escaping from a war zone, once again echoing familiar images from the nightly television news.

Other shots in *Gimme Shelter* resonate with contemporary news media coverage of the gruesome Tate-La Bianca murders by the Manson family that took place in the summer of 1969, just a week before the Woodstock festival and four months before Altamont.<sup>278</sup>

Cult leader Charles Manson was an ex-convict and would-be rock musician who had

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<sup>276</sup> At the time only film stills appeared in magazines. The Abraham Zapruder film of the Kennedy assassination was not screened on network television until 1975.

<sup>277</sup> Kitts, “Documenting, Creating, and Interpreting Moments of Definition,” 722.

<sup>278</sup> Steven M. Chermak and Frankie Y. Bailey, *Crimes and Trials of the Century* (Westport CT.: Greenwood Press, 2007), 293.

drifted into Haight-Ashbury during the Summer of Love before setting up a commune in Southern California.<sup>279</sup> In August 1969 commune members under his influence had killed seven people in two separate incidents, the murders having strongly ritualistic overtones. Their trial, which began in June 1970, was a huge media event attended by reporters from all over the world and when Manson's defense lawyers attempted to get it moved from Los Angeles, the judge ruled that there was nowhere in the United States that had not been saturated by the publicity.<sup>280</sup> *Gimme Shelter's* replayed footage of Meredith Hunter being repeatedly stabbed recalls the multiple stabbings that were a feature of each of the Manson family killings. Furthermore, the film's footage of wild-eyed people in the Altamont audience seemingly "freaking out" on hallucinogenic drugs is reminiscent of the widespread mainstream media hysteria around such drugs at the time, the Manson family's use of LSD being prolific and well-publicized. There was also an implicit association between rock music and the murders, with the title of the Beatles' song "Helter Skelter" found written in a victim's blood at one of the murder scenes.<sup>281</sup> Subsequently the mainstream media featured numerous (often untrue) horror stories of other drug-fuelled "hippie" atrocities.<sup>282</sup> As mentioned in chapter four, *Gimme Shelter* largely recapitulates this association between drugs, violence, and the counterculture in its portrayal of the Altamont concert. It also mirrors the prevailing mainstream media view in seeming to imply that the violent events that

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<sup>279</sup> Lee and Schlain, *Acid Dreams*, 185-186.

<sup>280</sup> S. L. Alexander, *Contemporary World Issues: The Media and American Courts* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2004), 16-17.

<sup>281</sup> Chermak and Bailey, *Crimes and Trials of the Century*, 294.

<sup>282</sup> Chermak and Bailey, 306-308.

occurred at the concert were the product of a dystopian counterculture rather than any reflection on wider American society.

### **The Rockumentaries as Media Spectacles**

As the rockumentaries moved from portraits of single acts, such as the Beatles in *What's Happening! The Beatles in the USA*<sup>283</sup> or Bob Dylan in *Don't Look Back*, to documenting the late 1960s multi-act rock festivals, the size, scale, and mass culture nature of the events led them into becoming broad overviews. The films attempted to capture a more widespread cultural phenomenon, with the festivals themselves constituted as media events and, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, the mediation of the events becoming part of the event itself and therefore part of the media spectacle.<sup>284</sup> *Woodstock* and the Rolling Stones' tour concert scenes of *Gimme Shelter* present the prototypical rock concert spectacle, encompassing not only the onstage performances, but also the passive, adoring and largely undifferentiated mass audience. In *Woodstock*, the festival audience becomes a key part of the media spectacle, its almost constant presence on a least one of the film's multiple split screens a reminder of its sheer size and scope. In the opening scene of the film an old man describes the festival as "too big for the world," and, almost as a refrain, there are periodic shots throughout the film where the audience actually fills the whole frame. They are depicted as row upon row of tiny figures, the individual audience members abstracted to such an extent that they become merely a pattern on the screen, reminiscent of a Jackson Pollock painting or a Stan Brakhage experimental film.

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<sup>283</sup> *What's Happening! The Beatles in the USA* (Albert Maysles and David Maysles, USA, 1964).

<sup>284</sup> Kellner, *Media Spectacle*, 2-3.

*Gimme Shelter* documents the spectacle of the Rolling Stones in live performance on their 1969 American tour. It presents the group in large concert arenas, on elevated stages looking down on a mass of faces, as red and blue searchlights circle overhead. From the semi-darkness of the concert audience the Rolling Stones appear luminous in the stage-lights. Their lead singer Mick Jagger is portrayed as a star, in a way that parallels Guy Debord's description of the Hollywood star as a "spectacular representation of a living human being."<sup>285</sup> Jagger is onscreen for almost the film's entirety and in the live performance scenes he is the main focus of the camera's attention, strutting across the stage, taunting the audience, and gesturing as if conducting the show. In "Sympathy for the Devil" he plays the role of Lucifer who, as Sheila Whiteley has suggested, may be "the ultimate master of ceremonies."<sup>286</sup> As Kellner has theorized, celebrities are "the icons of media culture"<sup>287</sup> and even backstage with the other Rolling Stones in *Gimme Shelter*'s editing suite scenes Jagger remains the focus of attention. As the media "face" of the group, he is singled out as their representative and it is he, rather than the concert promoters or the Rolling Stones' management, who is put into the position of having to respond to the camera's onscreen "interrogation."

Although the festival rockumentaries had their roots in the spectacles of hippie culture, such as the happenings, they were also part of a wider media environment that included the ongoing media spectacle of the Vietnam War, the race riots in the centre of major

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<sup>285</sup> Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (New York: Zone Books, 1995), 38.

<sup>286</sup> Sheila Whiteley, "Little Red Rooster v. the Honky Tonk Woman: Mick Jagger, Sexuality, Style and Image," in *Sexing the Groove*, ed. Sheila Whiteley (London: Routledge, 1997), 82.

<sup>287</sup> Kellner, *Media Spectacle*, 4.

American cities and huge mass political demonstrations, as well as large-scale sporting events and entertainment industry extravaganzas. Spectacle therefore provided the common ground for a convergence of the counterculture and the mainstream mass commodity culture. From their initial focus on a youth subculture that was at the time largely excluded from the mainstream media, the rockumentaries ended up presenting what was essentially a rock concert spectacle, in the process demonstrating Kellner's critique that, although the media spectacle contains the illusion of individuality, in reality it promotes a kind of mass conformity.<sup>288</sup> The concentration on spectacle highlighted the growing separation between rock's performers and their audience,<sup>289</sup> as well as the distancing of the music from the "real" concerns of the everyday. In addition, groups such as the Jimi Hendrix Experience in *Monterey Pop* and the Who in both *Monterey Pop* and *Woodstock* signaled the beginnings of what became known as "hard rock" or "heavy metal," with advances in amplification technology over this period enabling the music to be reproduced in live performance at a spectacularly loud volume. In this respect, *Monterey Pop*, *Woodstock*, and *Gimme Shelter* predicted rock's movement into larger and larger arenas and towards even more grandiose spectacles, as seen in 1970s stadium rock shows by the likes of Pink Floyd, Aerosmith, and Led Zeppelin. At the same time, the festival rockumentaries also prefigured the growing importance of film to the music industry, a trend that would subsequently become more fully realized with the music video phenomenon of the early 1980s.

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<sup>288</sup> Kellner, *Media Spectacle*, 3.

<sup>289</sup> George M. Plasketes, "Rock on Reel: the Rise and Fall of the Rock Culture in America Reflected in a Decade of Rockumentaries." *Qualitative Sociology* 12, no.1 (Spring, 1989), 66.

The spectacle of violence in the Altamont scenes of *Gimme Shelter* can be seen as part of the broader representation of violence in both the late 1960s news and entertainment medias. Gitlin has described the “edgy, apocalyptic popular culture” of the time, as exemplified by Rolling Stones’ songs such as “Street Fighting Man” and “Gimme Shelter” and “When the Music’s Over” and “Five to One” by the Doors.<sup>290</sup> That edgy, apocalyptic mood also manifested itself in an increasing incidence of violent images, with the relaxation of the Hollywood Production Code leading to much more graphic onscreen violence than ever before. It could be seen in New Hollywood fiction films such as *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) and *Easy Rider* (1969),<sup>291</sup> in the final scenes of each the camera dwelling on the deaths of the main protagonists.<sup>292</sup> Furthermore, violence was also seen as newsworthy, leading to sensational news images, such as that of a young Vietnamese girl running from a US napalm attack or the summary execution of a Viet-Cong suspect by a South Vietnamese officer, being continually reproduced and repeated over a range of media. At the time, this led to widespread concerns about the effects of the repetition of such violent imagery on the mass television audience and those concerns were reflected in contemporary media effects debates that continued beyond the 1960s and well into subsequent decades.<sup>293</sup>

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<sup>290</sup> Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching*, 202.

<sup>291</sup> *Bonnie and Clyde* (Arthur Penn, USA, 1967), *Easy Rider* (Dennis Hopper, USA, 1969).

<sup>292</sup> Gitlin, 198.

<sup>293</sup> At the time there were several major government commissions looking into the effects of television violence, for example The National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence (1969). See John P. Murray, “Media Violence: The Effects are both Real and Strong,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 51, no.8 (2008), 1215.

Whereas the Rolling Stones in live performance provided the spectacle for the first part of *Gimme Shelter*, the violence in the audience becomes the more commanding spectacle in the film's Altamont scenes. As a result, the onstage performers who had previously been the main focus of the camera's attention are reduced to becoming merely bystanders. Almost from the start, the Altamont scenes in the film feature a succession of violent images, with shots of apparently out-of-control audience members having bad drug experiences, shots of menacing-looking, armed and uniformed Hell's Angels, frenzied random beatings of people in the audience, and finally repeated replays of Meredith Hunter's stabbing. The Hell's Angels represent a key element in the spectacle. From *Gimme Shelter*'s first editing suite scene, in which Charlie Watts expresses his grudging admiration at the way they cleared a path through the crowd with their motorcycles, they are portrayed as having a violent aura that is both fascinating and repellant. As the cinematic audience already knows details of the murder from other media sources, the Angels come to resemble the villains in a fiction film. In the semi-darkness of the Altamont footage, the concert audience itself is also a component of the violent spectacle, a swirling, often threatening, mass that periodically engulfs the stage. In marked contrast to the purely theatrical violence of the Who's and Jimi Hendrix's destruction of instruments in *Monterey Pop*, the violence in *Gimme Shelter* never appears contained; there is even a sense that the filmmakers may themselves be targeted, recalling news footage of the "riot" at the 1968 Democrat Party National Convention in Chicago where the police attacked the news media. Yet, viewed as a trilogy, it is as if the violence that was previously repressed in both *Monterey Pop* and *Woodstock* suddenly becomes manifest in *Gimme Shelter*, in which the "other" America emerges raging from the

shadows. However, in the increasingly media-saturated environment of the late 1960s and early 1970s, such an encroachment seems almost inevitable and, in that respect, the repetition of violent images in *Gimme Shelter* can be read as simply a reflection of the broader representation of violence in both the contemporary news and entertainment medias, with the festival rockumentaries themselves becoming just another part of the overall media spectacle, in a process that continues to this day.

## Conclusion

Viewed as a trilogy, *Monterey Pop* (1968), *Woodstock* (1970), and *Gimme Shelter* (1970)<sup>294</sup> trace the shifting relationship that exists within the festival rockumentaries between performer, concert audience, cinematic spectator, and filmmaker. In *Monterey Pop*, not only is the spectator identified with the festival audience, but so too are the performers, with the implication that they are all part of a diverse, welcoming, and above all inclusive countercultural community. For its part, *Woodstock* attempts to reproduce the earlier film's utopian "summer of love" vision while at the same time treading the middle ground between counterculture celebration and media spectacle, documenting the different strands of the counterculture but always making reference to the wider media context of the festival. In contrast to *Monterey Pop*, *Woodstock* enacts a clear separation between the onstage performers and the festival audience, in the process reflecting the late 1960s rock hierarchy, whereby the musicians are portrayed as countercultural "leaders" and the audience as merely passive followers. In each of the earlier films the spectator's identification remains with the festival audience, but that shifts in the early tour concert scenes of *Gimme Shelter* in which the cinematic spectator is allowed the "privilege" of moving freely between two viewing positions, from that of the concert audience to that of the onstage performers. However, the alternating identification in

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<sup>294</sup> *Monterey Pop* (D. A. Pennebaker, USA, 1968), *Woodstock* (Michael Wadleigh, USA, 1970), *Gimme Shelter* (Albert Maysles, David Maysles and Charlotte Zwerin, USA, 1970).

*Gimme Shelter*'s early tour concert scenes is complicated by the "remediated"<sup>295</sup> nature of the backstage environment in the filmmaker's editing suite where the Rolling Stones are subject to replayed footage of events from the group's Altamont concert. In the film's second editing suite scene, the relationships between audience, performer, and spectator are much more distanced and the latter becomes more identified with the filmmaker's camera, watching the Rolling Stones' lead singer Mick Jagger backstage watching himself in front of a massed concert audience that is represented as both alien and threatening.

*Monterey Pop*, *Woodstock*, and *Gimme Shelter* also outline another shifting relationship; that between the onstage, the backstage, and the space of the audience. In doing so, they introduce another spatial region, the offstage. The backstage had been one of the chief tropes of direct cinema and of the earlier rockumentaries. It promised the cinematic spectator privileged behind-the-scenes access to political and entertainment celebrities such as John F. Kennedy, Jane Fonda, and Bob Dylan. Backstage, those celebrity subjects were seemingly portrayed as everyday people. However, the concept of the backstage becomes more complicated in rockumentaries such as *Don't Look Back*,<sup>296</sup> given that, even more than politicians, popular musicians such as Dylan are active and media savvy participants in the identity construction process. In *Don't Look Back* the backstage becomes, to use Erving Goffman's terminology, just another performance "region" for

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<sup>295</sup> Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin quoted in Karen D. Scott and Anne M. White, "Unnatural History? Deconstructing the *Walking with Dinosaurs* Phenomenon," *Media, Culture & Society*, vol. 25 (2003), 315.

<sup>296</sup> *Don't Look Back* (D. A. Pennebaker, USA, 1967).

the documentary subject.<sup>297</sup> Nevertheless, the extent of the backstage footage in *Don't Look Back* at least allows for the possibility of the spontaneous, unscripted moment that represented the “holy grail” for direct cinema practice.

In contrast to *Don't Look Back*, *Monterey Pop* and *Woodstock* are much less radical, with the backstage largely replaced by the offstage, an in-between space where the performers can be seen (but not heard) in the company of other performers and industry “insiders.” The inaudibility of the offstage reinforces the performers’ privileged status and, in *Woodstock* especially, their separation from the festival audience. Although the offstage performers are visible to both the audience and the spectator, the camera becomes more like a paparazzi camera, with fleeting but removed shots of interactions from which the filmmaker is either denied, or does not seek, any closer access. The offstage predicts the more tightly controlled musicians’ backstage of later rockumentaries, such as *The Last Waltz* (1978),<sup>298</sup> essentially rock concert films in which the spectator is confined to mere glimpses of the performers tuning their instruments or rehearsing acoustically for the upcoming show. Ultimately, the movement of *Monterey Pop* and *Woodstock* away from the depiction of the backstage and away from any setting where the performers might be portrayed as everyday people also represents a shift away from direct cinema’s original democratizing impulse. Without the backstage interaction these films devolve from direct cinema documentaries to mere filmed performances. In this they begin to resemble many pre-World War II documentaries in their uncritical presentation of the dynamics of the

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<sup>297</sup> Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1959), 106.

<sup>298</sup> *The Last Waltz* (Martin Scorsese, USA, 1978).

relationship between the celebrity musicians as countercultural leaders and their mass audience.

Nevertheless, the backstage does return in the editing suite scenes of *Gimme Shelter*. However, in this instance it is no longer the musicians' backstage, as seen in *Don't Look Back*, but the editing booth, essentially the filmmaker's backstage. The scene features Mick Jagger confronted by repeated replays of the events that occurred in the audience at the group's Altamont concert. The replays of Meredith Hunter's murder elicit a brief glimpse behind Jagger's performing persona, his awkwardness resembling that of an actor who does not know what mask he should wear relative to the situation. As with the film's handheld camera footage from within the Altamont concert audience, the second editing suite scene also represents something of a return to direct cinema's original observational methods and philosophies, with no questions actually asked onscreen and the filmmaker's camera documenting Jagger's reaction to the replayed footage. Nevertheless, he remains visibly conscious of the camera's presence, and, rather than simply observing according to early direct cinema theory and practice, the camera is acting more as a catalyst in the manner of *cinéma vérité*. At the same time, the scene also represents a return to the portraits of individual subjects that were a feature of earlier direct cinema documentaries (and *Don't Look Back*). The focus on the micro-political contrasts sharply with the earlier tour concert scenes in *Gimme Shelter* and also with the largely macro-political focus of both *Monterey Pop* and *Woodstock*, both essentially broad overviews of their festival subject matter. While on the one hand the singling out of Jagger as an individual subject signals a return to the scope and scale of earlier direct

cinema practice, on the other hand it also highlights his celebrity status as the media “face” of the Rolling Stones. The spectator has foreknowledge of the events that occurred from other media that Jagger at this point does not have and this builds up an expectation of how he might (or ought to) react. Therefore we become a party to setting a trap. The fact that the spectator’s knowledge comes from other media, the murder was captured on film, and its examination becomes the subject of another media event, a documentary, is also expressive of the media-saturated environment of the era. It serves as a reminder that the late 1960s were a very different media environment from that of direct cinema documentaries such as *Primary* from much earlier in the decade, where the celebrity subjects could be presented backstage in what appeared to be an extension of the everyday.

In their focus on the festival audiences, both *Monterey Pop* and *Woodstock* move away from the process whereby direct cinema documentaries put everyday people on the screen and allowed them to speak for themselves. For example, *Woodstock* features two young festivalgoers who answer a range of interview questions put to them by the filmmakers on issues such as free love, drugs and the generation gap. However, the questions frame the answers and their responses are presented as representative of the festival audience and the counterculture as a whole, as a general expression of a mass movement. In contrast to the direct cinema tradition of letting subjects speak for themselves, *Woodstock* appears to be using them to support prevalent mainstream media stereotypes. At the same time, elsewhere in the film interviewees are never allowed to speak at length, their

answers to interview questions often edited and compiled in a manner more reminiscent of the portrayals of everyday people as “types” in the Griersonian documentaries.

Furthermore, *Monterey Pop's* and *Woodstock's* collective depictions of the festival audiences are often more reminiscent of those same pre-World War II documentary forms. For example, the montage of applauding hands that follows Ravi Shankar's performance in *Monterey Pop* recalls the use of montage to express mass behaviour in Dziga Vertov's *The Man With the Movie Camera* (1929).<sup>299</sup> On occasions in *Woodstock*, shots of the festival audience are abstracted to such a degree that they resemble a pattern on the screen and in *Gimme Shelter's* Altamont scenes the concert audience is not only portrayed as a mass, but a mass that simply cannot be controlled. Such depictions provide another example of the trend within the festival rockumentaries towards a distancing of both performer and cinematic spectator from the festival audience, representing the performer intimately as an individual and the audience at a distance as a generalized mass, once again highlighting the shift away from direct cinema's original commitment to documenting everyday life.

Along with the shift away from the portrayal of everyday people as individuals (and from the portrayal of celebrities as everyday people), *Monterey Pop*, *Woodstock* and *Gimme Shelter* also move away from what Richard Barsam has called “the presentation of

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<sup>299</sup> *The Man With the Movie Camera* (Dziga Vertov, USSR, 1929).

disparate material as if it were equivalent.”<sup>300</sup> This represented a core part of original direct cinema philosophies, allowing the cinematic spectator to make up his or her own mind as to the significance or otherwise of the documented footage. Instead, the festival rockumentaries present the pre-established spectacle of a live rock music performance, giving the cinematic spectator a privileged close-up version of that experience. However, in their identification with the musical subject matter the rockumentaries are drawn into simply replicating its pre-existing power dynamics. The performers are portrayed on elevated stages, illuminated by stage lights and projections, and the audiences are shown below them, reacting to them, but (with the exception of the violence in *Gimme Shelter*) never initiating action in their own right. In *Woodstock* the live rock music spectacle is further enhanced in post-production by the use of then state-of-the-art cinematic effects such as multiple split screens and superimposed cinematography. While the editing process was an important part of every direct cinema documentary, the rockumentaries’ presentation of the musical performances cannot help but once again recall the previous use of the documentary form for the purposes of propaganda, again harking back to the pre-World War II documentaries and especially to Leni Riefenstahl’s *Triumph of the Will* (1935),<sup>301</sup> although here not in an overt promotion of the state but instead of a particular view of the 1960s counterculture.

As documents of mass-culture events in the media-saturated environment of the late 1960s, *Monterey Pop*, *Woodstock* and *Gimme Shelter* inevitably reflect the politics of

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<sup>300</sup> Richard M. Barsam, *Non-Fiction Film: A Critical History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 304.

<sup>301</sup> *Triumph of the Will* (Leni Riefenstahl, Germany, 1935).

their era. Both through their focus on the festival audiences and in their documenting of the live musical performances, the films reflect the ongoing tensions that existed within the 1960s counterculture between those who advocated collective political solutions and those who regarded the transformation of the self as the primary prerequisite for wider social change. *Monterey Pop* attempts to mediate those tensions in its representation of the Monterey festival as a celebration of countercultural cultural and spiritual unity. It portrays a context in which it becomes possible to imagine a very different social order, unclouded by the Vietnam War or the contemporary confrontations on American streets. On a much larger scale, *Woodstock* presents the rock festival as essentially a communal experience while at the same time acknowledging the ever-present backdrop of the war and the tensions between the counterculture and the dominant culture. Yet the tensions within the counterculture itself lie barely beneath the surface. Released only eight months later, in the wake of events such as the killings at Kent State, the deaths of Janis Joplin and Jimi Hendrix, as well as the Tate-La Bianca murders by the Manson family, *Gimme Shelter* reflects those tensions and the sense of frustration and disillusionment that had overwhelmed the counterculture by the end of the decade as the war seemed to grind on with no end in sight, despite all the protests and political opposition. It presents that same counterculture as racked by both internal and external disagreements and as incapable of sustainable transformation either on a collective or a personal level.

Ultimately, *Monterey Pop*, *Woodstock*, and *Gimme Shelter* represent a mismatch of methodology and subject matter. The sheer size and scale of the late 1960s rock festivals

made it difficult or near impossible for the filmmakers to continue direct cinema's original micro-political focus. Instead, the festival rockumentaries become more broad overviews of large-scale mass culture events, in a way more reminiscent of the pre-World War II documentary forms that the original direct cinema practitioners had so strongly rejected. The closeness of the filmmakers' identification with the musical subject matter also brought problems, with the counterculture becoming increasingly commercialized and what had originally been underground music soon co-opted by the major music labels. With commercial imperatives becoming more dominant, backstage access was either restricted or denied, with direct cinema rockumentaries such as *Cocksucker Blues* (1972)<sup>302</sup> subsequently prevented from theatrical release by legal injunctions from their celebrity subjects. This is likely to have been a contributing factor in the shift away from the direct cinema trope of the backstage and therefore from the juxtaposition of the public and private that was so much a feature of earlier rockumentaries such as *Don't Look Back*. The rockumentaries' previously established identification with the counterculture also created complications for *Gimme Shelter's* documenting of the events at Altamont. In that film the spectator is increasingly distanced by camera positioning as the concert audience becomes the site of a dystopian carnival and as Mick Jagger is confronted by repeated replays of Meredith Hunter's murder, in a scene that contains a distinct element of indictment.

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<sup>302</sup> *Cocksucker Blues* (Robert Frank, USA, 1972). According to <[www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com)> the film is under a court order that only allows it to be shown once a year, with director Robert Frank to be present in person.

While the Altamont scenes of *Gimme Shelter* represent something of a return to original direct cinema philosophies, both in their documenting of the spontaneous events within the concert audience and in their intimate portrait of Mick Jagger, the singling out of Jagger also promotes an awareness of his status as a media celebrity. As such, the festival rockumentaries themselves constitute a prototypical example of what Douglas Kellner has called the “media spectacle,”<sup>303</sup> where the mediation of the event becomes part of the event itself. The rockumentaries already had their roots in the spectacles of hippie culture, such as the “happenings,” but they were also part of a wider media environment that included the ongoing media spectacles of the Vietnam War, the inner city riots, and mass political demonstrations, as well as massive sporting events and entertainment industry extravaganzas. The spectacle provided the common ground for countercultural and mass commodity cultural convergence. From their initial focus on a youth subculture that was at the time largely excluded from the mainstream media, the rockumentaries ended up presenting a rock music spectacle that simply reinforced the conformity that characterized every other area of contemporary consumer culture. In this way the festival rockumentaries demonstrate Kellner’s critique that the spectacle contains the illusion of individuality but instead promotes a kind of mass conformity.<sup>304</sup> As the rockumentaries moved away from direct cinema methods and philosophies, they also moved away from direct cinema’s original democratizing impulse and increasingly into the service of media spectacle. Furthermore, *Gimme Shelter*’s Altamont scenes provided a cautionary example for both musicians and the music industry of what not to do and it

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<sup>303</sup> Douglas Kellner, *Media Spectacle* (London: Routledge, 2003), 4-5.

<sup>304</sup> Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (New York: Zone Books, 1995), 30. Kellner, *Media Spectacle*, 4-5.

is likely the film influenced a more conservative turn in later rockumentaries such as *The Song Remains the Same* (1976)<sup>305</sup> and *The Last Waltz*, which effectively removed any possibility of the spontaneous, unscripted moment. These documentaries largely excluded the concert audience and reduced the backstage to something more akin to the concept of the offstage introduced in *Monterey Pop* and *Woodstock*, with token scenes of the musicians in the company of other musicians, thereby reinforcing the hierarchies of the 1970s rock performance which were not broken down again until punk rockumentaries such as *The Decline of Western Civilization* (1981)<sup>306</sup> more than a decade later.

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<sup>305</sup> *The Song Remains the Same* (Peter Clifton and Joe Massot, UK, 1976).

<sup>306</sup> *The Decline of Western Civilization* (Penelope Spheeris, USA, 1981).

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