


6-2016

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Culture of Conflict: Watching the end of the 1960's American Counterculture

Through Documentaries About Rock Music

By

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Submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for

Honors of the Department of American Studies

UNION COLLEGE

June, 2016

ABSTRACT

STEINBERG, MATTHEW Culture of Conflict: Watching the end of the 1960's American Counterculture Through Documentaries About Rock Music. Department of American Studies, June 2016

ADVISOR: Andrew Feffer

The 1960's was a complicated time in American History. The decade started with Chubby Checker's "The Twist" and concluded on "The End" by The Doors. The explosion of a youth counterculture is captured and preserved on film; a medium that was rapidly becoming more mobile, personal, and artistic. The expansion of the documentary field coincided with a unique cultural blossoming centered around rock music and the results of these films leave us with an audiovisual history of extraordinary moments in time. This thesis closely examines the development and issues of performance or rock documentaries to better understand the violent demise of the youth culture, often labeled as the murder of Meredith Hunter by the Hell's Angels. Using films by the Maysles brothers, arguably the most prominent documentarians of the decade, one can witness a transformation in film, music, and a unique culture of conflict. This thesis will examine clips from this audiovisual chronology to view the formation, development, and finale of a unique decade that ended during Jimi Hendrix performance at Woodstock and not after Meredith Hunter's death at the Altamont Speedway.

Chapter 1: Rock Cinema

Development and Issues of Performance Documentaries of Rock and Roll

The Rolling Stones sit in the control room of Muscle Shoals Sound Studio listening to the final cut of their single “Wild Horses.” Keith Richards reclines on a couch mouthing the words and the other members of the band listen silently. Drummer Charlie Watts looks into a camera held by Albert Maysles, not breaking his gaze for ten seconds. This would become an iconic moment from Maysles’ film *Gimme Shelter* (1970) forever immortalized and remembered by fans of rock music. However, representing rock music in documentary film does not always involve this much insight into the character behind the music. Depicting more than just a band on stage playing music can be a challenge to filmmakers who pursue films about performances. Performance documentary filmmaking can be a challenge to filmmakers who must decide what to include on screen, how to make an interesting narrative, and how to incorporate interesting elements without distracting from the experience of the music. Fortunately, the live music experience intrigues many viewers and the revelations the music offers make for interesting subject matter. This study will attempt to show the evolution of performance documentaries through the 1960’s and 1970’s and how they have affected, and been affected by the live experience of music, ultimately making these films cherished social artifacts that have enhanced music listening and viewing since their release.

The term documentary is used to describe nonfiction films, based in reality about real people. The term was first used in the 1920’s by John Grierson referring to Robert Flaherty’s fictional film *Moana* (1926), saying the film was “documentary

in intention,” or intended to document some aspect of life.¹ Documenting everyday life was the intention of the first short films made in late 1890’s by the Lumière brothers Auguste Marie Louis Nicolas and Louis Jean. Inspired by Edison’s Kinetoscope, they created a camera that doubled as a projector to make films about everyday life. The brothers were influenced by still photography and wanted to bring life to still images.² People passing through the frame and interacting with one another were captivating new concepts for people to see. There is a sense of fascination the viewer has when he or she witnesses the lives of others living in the same historical world that they do.³

Yet the Lumière’s films were a documentation of everyday life, these films were not considered documentaries. The first successful film of this genre, often credited as the first documentary, is Robert Flaherty’s *Nanook of the North* (1922). Flaherty’s film follows the lives of the Inuit people in the Canadian Arctic through depictions of igloo building, walrus hunting, and interactions with the civilized world. The film was the first successful documentary because it was centered on an ethnographic narrative. In other words, the film had the purpose of exposing the life of the Inuit. Furthermore, Flaherty’s film had a protagonist, Nanook, who as the patriarch of the family had the most interactions on screen. While *Nanook of the North* is still considered as a documentary by many, Flaherty’s manipulation of characters, scenes, and misrepresentation of reality were contrived. Flaherty employed Inuit actors of no relation to portray a family and most of the sequences in

¹ Michael Rabiger, *Directing the Documentary* (Massachusetts: Focal Press 2009), 42-43.

² Rabiger, *Directing the Documentary*, 37.

³ Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary* (Indiana: University Press, 2010), xii.

the film are staged. The Inuit no longer used many of the survival techniques shown in the film, but Flaherty wanted his actors to use these ancestral practices because they made for a more interesting subject matter. In fact, the film we see in *Nanook of the North* is actually the second edition, after Flaherty's tapes were burned in an accident. This manipulation and misrepresentation of reality led some to challenge the classification of Flaherty's film as a true documentary. A problem with documenting reality is that everyday life can be boring, but the best filmmakers can be in the right place at the right time and have the patience to capture life's interesting moments on camera.

Nanook of the North brings up the challenges of capturing reality on camera and the styles each filmmaker uses to view their subject. Jumping through decades of development and evolution, there are a number of styles of documentary filmmaking that typically fall into two major categories: participatory and observational. This study will focus entirely on observational style documentaries. With the advent of synchronous-sound technology and mobile, handheld cameras, the observational documentary style became popular in the 1960's, which allowed a new era of documentaries to begin. This style seeks to show its subjects through observing without interacting or manipulating situations. Filmmakers who use direct cinema or cinéma vérité styles try to be unobtrusive and often use the available light of a situation to avoid staging and acting. Technological advances in the early sixties such as the Nagra tape recorder, portable sync-sound 16mm camera, and cheap film allowed for documentaries to adopt a new style of narrative

that was accompanied by a stylistic blossoming through the following decades.⁴

This new narrative was centered on characters: a person or a group of people during specific moments or a single event.

Another issue that Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* brings up is the question: What is real about this picture? A camera's presence in a room will undoubtedly change something about a situation. Humans tend to change their behavior when they are being observed and a camera represents a permanent recording of one's behavior. So if a camera produces a change in the human situation, are documentaries truly depictions of reality? The world has developed into a place where everyone can carry a camera in their pocket and social media has conditioned many people, especially celebrities and rock stars to seek observation by others. But for the majority of the twentieth century, documentary filmmakers experienced the challenge of trying to remain unobtrusive and inconspicuous with their video and audio recording equipment. In films like *Gimme Shelter* and *Pink Floyd: Live at Pompeii* the camera crew is shown on screen and actually becomes part of the film and subject matter. This can be an effective tool in constructing a narrative, but for the purposes of understanding the challenges of documentary filmmaking, it is important to recognize that most of the filmmakers in the 1960's and 1970's were trying to remain unseen in order to capture the drama and intrigue that reality had to offer.⁵ Being the "fly-on-the-wall" or being purely observational, in effect, would make the viewer feel as if he or she were present at the time of filming.

⁴ Paula Rabinowitz, *They Must be Represented: The Politics of Documentary* (New York/London: Verso, 1994), 133.

⁵ Rabiger, *Directing the Documentary*, 53.

This sense of being present or aware of events that have happened far away in time and space is what intrigues viewers of the documentary. Michael Rabiger describes the experience of viewing a documentary film as being in the present eternal tense.⁶ Essentially, a film of reality allows the viewer to be present as if they were seeing life through the camera's lens, but because it is recorded on film it is eternal and this feeling can be relived many times. The viewer is prompted to want to learn more about the subjects on screen because the film takes place in the world in which the viewer lives. Audiences of documentaries interact with the films with the expectation that their desire to know more about the world will be satisfied after watching the film.⁷

This fascination with learning more about the world is not limited to documentary films, however, and was most likely cultivated in the early to mid-twentieth century when the majority of film that people saw was newsreel footage. Newsreel was the leading source of documentary style footage through the first half of the twentieth century; crowds gathered daily in theaters to learn what was happening in the world. A simple narrative formed around the news: these are things happening in the world in which we live. Voiceovers and title screens relayed information to the audience and held together this loose storyline. Newsreel offered an intermediary between facts and fiction by representing preconceived narratives of peoples and cultures as visual facts on screen.⁸ Essentially, newsreel footage brought the foreign and exotic into contact with the ordinary, middle-class

⁶ Rabiger, *Directing the Documentary*, 37.

⁷ Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, 38.

⁸ Rabinowitz, *They Must be Represented*, 92.

white viewer.⁹ As the viewer's desire to know more about the world expanded, technological advances in film and sound equipment allowed more documenting to occur. As viewers became attached to real people and moments in time, the need to record documentary subject matter became more crucial.

Filmmakers of the sixties began using more portable camera and sound technology to capture the reality of the world around them. A period of rapid growth and development in the documentary genre coincided with a cultural explosion of rock music in the 1960's that would have not been possible without portable and versatile recording equipment. Rock expanded to the medium and film that helped establish the performance documentary as a popular art form. The success and popularity of the documentary in the 1960's was dependent upon advancing film and sound technologies. In the history of film, technology has often dictated the limits and possibilities of filmmaking. Films were shot on 35-millimeter silent film from the 1890's when the Lumière brothers began making short films until the 1920's when synchronizing sound became possible and the 16-millimeter film was invented. The cinematic experience was theatrical and the filmmaker manipulated nearly all of the footage in some way or another.¹⁰ In the 1930's the documentary form began to take shape as expositions on social or economic difference were beginning to be produced with images held together by a voice-over commentary or title screens.¹¹ Organizations such as Workers Film and Photo League of the 1930's provided information on strikes and other issues of the

⁹ Rabinowitz, *They Must be Represented*, 92.

¹⁰ Rabiger, *Directing the Documentary*, xx.

¹¹ Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, 26.

working class. This style of narrative was designed to create a sense of community through desired change and group action.¹²

Most documentaries were silent through the 1950's, however, and it was not until the 1960's that faster film, portable sync-sound equipment, and shoulder mounted cameras allowed the mobility for a new narrative to take form.

Documentaries tend to tell history from below, or from common people. This practice originated in the 1930's Film was being used as a medium to support anti-war efforts through newsreel footage and home videos of grassroots organizing.¹³ These marginalized cultures of the 1960's and 1970's include the counter culture and music scenes that were prevalent during this time period. The direct cinema approach to following bands, performers, and performances during this period made this into the most popular and commercially successful time for documentaries.¹⁴ Moreover, these films catalyzed the growth of rock music and the rock star figure much like television stimulated interest in Elvis Presley.

As cameras became more accessible, affordable, and easier to use the exuberance of the American counterculture was dwindling, as depicted in existing films. Naturally, this drove the evolution of documentary narrative to follow the individual, and subject matter became more personal. Films of the later decades of the twentieth century began to reexamine issues from the past, but from a different standpoint. Issues that were only addressed from above; from the point of view of leaders, nations, or organizations were now being addressed from below, by the

¹² Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, 223.

¹³ Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, 228.

¹⁴ Brian Winston, *Claiming the Real: The Griersonian Documentary and its Legitimations* (BFI: London, 1995), 205.

people affected in some capacity. Documentaries of the fifties and sixties outside of Rock Cinema draw attention to social issues that tend to unite or divide viewers in belief, but at this time they were highlighting the complex and revealing lives of specific individuals who confronted these issues.¹⁵

Representing performances in documentary has its challenges; these films lack the typical structure and must take on their own style in order to captivate the audience. Performance documentaries are often promoted as giving a back stage pass to the viewer or access to the lives of musicians they would not otherwise see.¹⁶ Because these films do not follow conventional narrative discourse, the performance of music becomes an essential feature of the story. Live music performances offer a bounty of exciting qualities like breathtaking guitar solos, incredible light shows, and unique dancing. Catching these features tastefully on film is what filmmakers attempt to do as they capture the experience of being present for the music. Academics and critics look at the effectiveness of rock documentaries including the representation of music, role of the diegetic audience, displaying of character and contemporary culture.

In his book *Theory of Film* (1960), Siegfried Kracauer criticized music performances on film. Kracauer disapproved of filmmakers' tendencies to break from the musicians to show the crowd or other aspects of the environment. While a film could have the power to make the viewer feel as if they are present at the performance, Kracauer believed that cuts and constant camera movement remind

¹⁵ Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, 248.

¹⁶ Thomas F. Cohen, *Playing to the Camera: Musicians and Musical Performance in Documentary Cinema* (New York/London: Wallflower, 2012), 10.

the viewer that they are watching a film and not a musical performance.¹⁷

Furthermore, the author believed that as the camera leaves the performance to reveal the crowd, despite the cinematic benefits, it interferes with the experience of listening to the music. Kracauer's text is still canonical as a mid-twentieth century book on film, but the following decades would prove him to be a contrarian in his views of music performances on screen. It is important to note that Kracauer was probably not a fan of attending live rock concerts and his ideas on the experience of listening to music had little to do with rock and everything to do with classical music. An obvious flaw in Kracauer's claims of performance films being a distraction from the music-listening experience is that the experience of listening to live rock is more than simply hearing the music. Some argue that most of the audience members at a given rock show are not listening to the music in the way that Kracauer describes. In addition, rock music performances are about more than pure music, there is a sense of physicality and a physical-visual experience that filmmakers try to recreate for authenticity in order to appeal to the rock audience.¹⁸ Putting these experiences on film is important in the documenting of a musical performance.

Others argue that film representations of live performances are necessary in cinema and for the growth of music and music performances. Philip Auslander opposes Kracauer's views and states that camera cuts and movements are not distractions from the music but rather replications of the spectator's wandering

¹⁷ Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (New York: Oxford Press, 1960), 146.

¹⁸ Cohen, *Playing to the Camera*, 14.

eye.¹⁹ Thomas Cohen mediates these two positions by saying that music's sonic wonders must go above and beyond the physical-visual presence of performers on screen for the viewer to solely listen to the music. But he also thinks that physical movements and interactions on screen are important aspects of the event and a crucial part of the cinematic experience.²⁰

One can better understand this argument by looking at Bert Stern's film *Jazz on a Summer's Day* (1960). Stern's film can be considered a precursor to the era of performance documentaries that would begin to thrive by the end of the decade, but this work is visually similar and contains the same elements as later performance documentaries. *Jazz on a Summer's Day* chronicles the Newport Jazz Festival in the summer of 1958 with jazz icons such as Thelonious Monk, Anita O'Day, Gerry Mulligan, and Louis Armstrong. The film is set in the city of Newport, Rhode Island, which at the time of the festival was simultaneously hosting the America's Cup Yacht Races. Stern spends a significant portion of time introducing the setting of Newport with extensive shots through the city and into the festival grounds. While establishing place and time are important elements of a cinematic narrative, Stern's constant intermingling of scenes from the city of Newport and images of yacht racing have been criticized as major distractions from the music and festival.^{21,22} However, Stern's treatment of musical performances as profilmic elements, or elements shown onscreen, are artistically revolutionary as the performers move and

¹⁹ Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (New York/London: Routledge, 2008/2012), 19.

²⁰ Cohen, *Playing to the Camera*, 12-15.

²¹ Phillip Riley, "Jazz on a Summer's Day," *Sight & Sound XXX* (1960-1961): 38.

²² "Jazz on a Summer's day," *Monthly Film Bulletin XXVII* (1960): 102.

dance around the space. Inspired by his career in still photography, Stern's depiction of the festival and the performers on stage certainly influenced future filmmakers.²³

An important feature to analyze from Stern's film is the role of the audience. Stern uses the audience effectively as a source of energy to guide the viewer through the duration of the festival. He shows people arriving at the festival grounds and throughout the performances he shows the emotion and response to the music. In one sequence, Anita O'Day takes the stage and begins a slow song; the audience is shown listening but not fully attentive. It appears to be a hot day in Newport and the audience is tired and disinterested, but her performance – her emotion and musical prowess – transforms and energizes the crowd, which gives her a standing ovation as she leaves the stage. Using the audience in this manner builds excitement and tension over the time within a film. Another example of Stern's use of audience on screen comes during the Gerry Mulligan Quartet's performance. As Mulligan blows into his oversized baritone saxophone, Stern chooses to show the crowd reactions of mostly women. As the song enters Mulligan's solo the band picks up and the female's reactions become slightly more suggestive and borderline on sensual. With dark, red lighting and the nighttime atmosphere smoothly captured on screen, Stern's editing appears to "suggest an analogy between horn and woman."²⁴

Stern's treatment of the diegetic audience was innovative and important for future filmmakers of performance documentaries and his editing techniques explore

²³ Cohen, *Playing to the Camera*, 24.

²⁴ Cohen, *Playing to the Camera*, 31.

the challenge of depicting the real. When the audience sees a woman reacting to Gerry Mulligan's baritone horn in the film, the question is raised: Is this what actually happened? Or was she dancing to Louis Armstrong's "When the Saints Go Marching In," and Stern felt it fit better for her to be included in the Mulligan Quartet sequence? The lighting of this scene also suggests that her reaction could have been staged after the filming of the festival. This type of cinematic manipulation is used in most forms of film entertainment. Before filmmakers had the power to edit in reactions to other acts, audiences' reactions were controlled like the clagues of Ancient Rome or an applause sign. Moreover, the structure of live performance and movements of performers on stage have conditioned concertgoers to react in certain ways and respond at certain times but the camera is not always able to capture these reactions in real time.²⁵ Filmmakers try to recreate and sometime manipulate the footage of the audience to give the viewer a desired effect. The filmmaker or editor has the power to make the audience appear to be reacting in any way he or she chooses.²⁶ Most likely, Stern did not stage the woman's reaction to Mulligan's baritone solo, but it is unclear if her reaction is actually to Mulligan's solo.

Bill Nichols explains, "Documentary flourishes when it gains a voice of its own. Producing accurate documents or visual evidence does not lend it such a voice."²⁷ Essentially, simply documenting a performance and an audience's reaction to that performance may not provide a filmmaker with enough material for a story.

²⁵ Auslander, *Liveness*, 25.

²⁶ Rabinowitz, *They Must be Represented*, 21.

²⁷ Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 85.

Documentarians use the manipulation of real events through editing to form a stronger, more powerful narrative that appears to be a cohesive document of an event. This is tacitly understood among documentary filmmakers and is a strong challenge to Siegfried Kracauer's interpretation of filmmaking as an art form. Kracauer in *Theory of Film* believes that films gain a voice of their own because they are able represent a physical reality. In regards to the filmmakers manipulation of this physical reality Kracauer states, "...the documentary maker eliminates the intrigue so as to be able to open his lens on the world; on the other, he feels urged to re-introduce dramatic action in the very same interest."²⁸ Without the control of subjects to create a narrative structure and plot that fiction filmmakers have, the documentary filmmaker is often obligated to use some sort of manipulation.²⁹ The extent of a filmmaker's manipulation of the real in documentaries is hard to gauge, but in most instances the viewer trusts the storyteller behind the film and believes that what they are seeing is in fact real. Films are effective when they can make the viewer believe the story they have told. Documentaries have an advantage over fictional films because they take place in the real world.

There is an important relationship between the audience and performer that must be included in the recording of a given performance. Documentaries tend to depict communities; live performances create a community between performers and spectators and among the spectators.³⁰ In most performance documentaries the camera acts as an omniscient spectator that has a clear view of the stage, typically

²⁸ Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 212.

²⁹ Stephen Mamber, *Cinema Verite in America: Studies in Uncontrolled Documentary* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1974), 19.

³⁰ Auslander, *Liveness*, 3.

multiple viewpoints and backstage access.³¹ Rock documentaries have adopted this spectator point of view as a way of recreating and enticing the performance experience. In this format, seeing other audience members on screen reminds the viewer of their place in the performer-audience relationship, but when the camera cuts to backstage scenes this makes the viewer feel privileged and important. A central aspect of this relationship that appears in a number of performance documentaries is the idea of the stage. In films like *Gimme Shelter*, *Woodstock*, and *Wattstax* the construction of the stage is shown as a reminder of the separation between audience and performer.³² The idea of the stage can be more complex like the extremely low stage in *Gimme Shelter* that leads to the breakdown in separation between audience and performers, ultimately becoming a central point of drama and narrative for that film. Similarly, in *Pink Floyd: Live at Pompeii* there is no stage as the band is playing for the spirits and not an audience. The band is playing right on the earth of Pompeii; at points they are shown playing in the dirt and it covers their equipment. A filmmaker's ability to represent these elements of the physical reality can alter the narrative and aesthetics of a performance documentary.

The representation of the real in documentaries is not limited to the role of the audience and arguably more important is the role of behind the scenes footage. Much like the viewer's inability to distinguish the extent of reality during audience reactions, the viewer has little way of knowing whether a story developed out of a filmmaker's material or whether it was forcibly extracted from that material by the

³¹ Cohen, *Playing to the Camera*, 120.

³² Cohen, *Playing to the Camera*, 118.

filmmaker.³³ Another problem for the representation of the real in performance documentaries is that simply showing a musical performance can be a misrepresentation of the truth because performers tend to have personas on stage that are not true representations of themselves. A filmmaker must offer some insight into the character of said persona. When rock documentaries were originating in the mid 1960's they started as unplanned and unstructured capturing of events, like *What's Happening! The Beatles First U.S. Visit* that was spontaneously filmed over the course of five days by the Maysles brothers.³⁴ These films, though simple in structure, offer insight through observation and use different styles to reveal their subjects. In other words, different direct cinema and cinéma vérité techniques were used by filmmakers of this era such as Richard Leacock, D.A. Pennebaker, Albert Maysles, and Michael Wadleigh to explore the rock musicians, festivals, and performances. Richard Lester's *A Hard Day's Night* (1964), a fictional comedy film about the lives of the Beatles, inspired D.A. Pennebaker to follow Bob Dylan on his U.K. tour for *Don't Look Back*. The Maysles tend to have a different style in which "the revelation of personality takes precedence over any attempt to create fictional structure."³⁵ Pennebaker is often noted for his camera being intrusive and altering the physical reality of his subjects, especially in *Don't Look Back*, but the Maysles recognized the impossibility for the camera to be invisible and instead tried not to upset the natural balance of the camera-subject relationship.³⁶ In other words, the camera becomes an intermediary between the subject and the

³³ Mamber, *Cinema Verite in America*, 21.

³⁴ Mamber, *Cinema Verite in America*, 23, 146.

³⁵ Joe McElhaney, *Albert Maysles* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 65.

³⁶ Mamber, *Cinema Verite in America*, 153.

viewer. Rock documentaries of the 1960's and 1970's "invite interpretation of their subjects as social and cultural phenomena – exploring the milieu they travel through and the responses people make to them."³⁷ While film styles vary between filmmakers and over time, the intention of these films is often similar.

The explosion of direct cinema could not have been successful without the popularity and fascination with rock music during the same period. Rock music and rock musicians created ideal subjects for the pioneering art form of *cinéma vérité*. There was a high social value placed on rock and playing live in concert and at festivals determined a band's credibility and marketability. Failure to play enough shows or missing out on certain events diminished a band's reputation and legitimacy.³⁸ Similar to Kracauer's theory on performances on film, some critics argue that the primary function of rock music is for recordings and not live performance. Theodore Gracyk argues that the rock audience mostly listens to speakers producing sounds of recordings, thus the actual instruments and playing of these instruments become secondary.³⁹ On the other hand, studio recordings are basically mixed to sound as if they were recorded live and there appears to be strong link between studio recordings and live performances in rock music that is not present in other genres.⁴⁰ In the age before the music video, the experience of listening to rock recordings needed visual enhancement for the listener to engage and imagine an artist performing the music they were listening to.

³⁷ Mamber, *Cinema Verite in America*, 154.

³⁸ Auslander, *Liveness*, 80.

³⁹ Theodore Gracyk, "Listening to Music: Performances and Recordings," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 55 (1997): 139.

⁴⁰ Auslander, *Liveness*, 64, 81.

Regardless of one's position in the argument on the importance of live performances against that of studio recordings, rock undeniably relies heavily on visual representation. Rock is visualized through a number of mediums: album covers, liner notes, posters, advertisements, magazines, photography, and film. By and large, visual representations of rock musicians up until the mid-sixties were created to promote the record and ticket sales of an artist by glorifying their live persona. But films offered an insight that still images and even the most poignant liner notes could not provide. They also had the opportunity to present a new truth or a new real to which rock audiences previously had little exposure. This new medium for visualizing rock brought the social culture of the 1960's into the realm of memory, repetition, and displacement in time.⁴¹ People who were not able to attend concerts or festivals were able to experience them in the theater. While this experience could not be the same as actually attending the event, for the first time in rock's history there was an active depiction of these events for people to experience over and over again at their own convenience. And though this new form of documentary did very little to directly effect the social and political affairs of the 1960's, they depicted a culture that was facing the social and political issues of the modern world – the same world that the viewer lived in. ⁴² Daniel Schowalter states:

Documentary film enjoys a special status in cinema as it wields a certain authority in its discourse...it has always enjoyed a special presumed license on 'truth.' For this reason documentary rhetoric's ability to move audiences,

⁴¹ Auslander, *Liveness*, 16.

⁴² Cohen, *Playing to the Camera*, 60.

to make history, can be formidable, and its ability to 'make sense' of the world often powerful.⁴³

These films, aside from their depictions of some of rock's most iconic moments, are important social artifacts that enhance future listening of music. They also act as a social history of the counterculture with its peak in the 1960's and its displacement through the following decade.

This paper will attempt to identify the significance, both past and present, of the major performance and rock documentaries of the 1960's and 1970's as social artifacts. As artifacts these films are indicative of the meaning of its subjects and creators. By examining the evolution of these films in style, form, and subject matter one will be able to understand the cultural and technical development of the rock music culture and the performance documentary style that essentially developed around one another. It is important to realize that these rock films of the 1960's helped establish rock music and culture as a "ubiquitous social phenomenon" through the 1970's.⁴⁴ Using the Maysles' *What's Happening! The Beatles First U.S. Visit* (1964) and *Gimme Shelter* (1970), one can track the social and political changes in the United States to better understand the culture of American conflict in the 1960's. Thomas Cohen writes:

So much happened in the mere five years between the two films: the rise of FM radio, the advent and spread of psychedelic drugs in society at large, the increasingly violent confrontations between protesters and supporters of the Vietnam War, the Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King assassinations, the conflict between police and the Black Panthers, the debacle at the

⁴³ Daniel F. Schowalter, "Remembering the Dangers of Rock and Roll: Toward Historical Narrative of the Rock Festival," *Critical Studies in Media Communication*. 17 (2000): 100.

⁴⁴ Cohen, *Playing to the Camera*, 55.

Democratic Chicago Convention in 1968, the demise of SDS and rise of the Weathermen, and so on.⁴⁵

By tracking nearly any individual through these films, one can identify a transition or transformation. Tracking Jimi Hendrix's style and performances in *Monterey Pop* (1968) and *Woodstock* (1970) it is clear that there was a transformation in Hendrix. By the end of the decade Hendrix, who initially played with two white band mates, was playing significantly more jam-oriented songs with a larger band consisting of four additional black members. Moreover, Jefferson Airplane's performances at *Monterey Pop* (1968), *Woodstock* (1970), and *Gimme Shelter* (1970) show an increasing radicalization in the band. In *Gimme Shelter*, lead singer Marty Balin jumps off stage and is knocked out by a member of the Hell's Angels. The radicalization culminates with violence and contributes to the legacy of that film and concert as the end of an era. This paper will explain how the end of this era ended during Jimi Hendrix's performance at Woodstock and not during the Rolling Stone's performance at the Altamont Speedway. In addition, this study will examine the use of the stage as a narrative tool in the performer-audience relationship.

⁴⁵ Cohen, *Playing to the Camera*, 60.

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Rock Cinema Chapter 2
Maysles in the Sixties:
Rock Documentaries as a Social Examination
of the End of the Sixties American Counterculture

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Chapter 2: Rock Cinema
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“Lotta freaks!” exclaims Arlo Guthrie to a crowd of around 300,000 people gathered in the small town of Bethel Woods, NY on August 15, 1969. This was the first night of the three-day music and arts festival held in New York at the end of the summer of 1969. The festival is remembered for the hundreds of thousands of people who attended without tickets, turning the hamlet of Bethel Woods into a disaster zone. More importantly, people commend the festivals participants for their uncanny ability to coexist without conflict.

Four months later, organizers tried to replicate the success of Woodstock by holding a free concert outside of San Francisco. The Rolling Stones headlined this Woodstock of the West. Sporadic violence, however, in front of the stage between fans, unofficial security by the Hell’s Angels, and even band members made it clear that this event was no Woodstock. When the Rolling Stones took the stage the violence only escalated until a member of the Hell’s Angels motorcycle gang stabbed a fan to death. The death of Meredith Hunter has retroactively been labeled the end of the 1960’s. How so much could change within the culture that surrounded the music of the 1960’s in the mere four months between Woodstock and Altamont baffles many, but a close examination of the counterculture and historical context through the films that immortalize these events can offer tremendous insight into the splintering and ultimate demise of a unique culture in history.

An examination of culture through documentary films about rock performances should not be limited to Michael Wadleigh's *Woodstock* and the Maysles brothers' (and Charlotte Zwerin) *Gimme Shelter*, both released in 1969. Using an earlier work by the Maysles *What's Happening! The Beatles in the US* (1964) one can view unprecedented social change coupled with a blossoming of stylistic and technical advancements in documentary film. This chapter will take a close look at the development of the documentary genre through the Maysles films, specifically using *What's Happening! The Beatles in the US* and *Gimme Shelter* as important markers of the beginning and end of a cultural trend. Between these two films important historical and social changes coincided with a rapid development of rock documentaries. All of these forces ultimately culminated in an extraordinary event at Altamont, captured on film and preserved forever. Taking a look at the development of the counter culture in the early sixties can also explain the differences between Woodstock and Altamont at the end of the decade.

Before the Maysles brothers Albert and David were prominent documentarians known for their films *Salesman* (1968) and *Grey Gardens* (1976), a large portion of their filmography was shooting commercials and following celebrities. While making commercials helped the Maysles pay bills and start their own production company in New York City, it was experimental documentary work that they were passionate about. Advances in camera and syncsound equipment made it possible to record people with simultaneous image and sound on the go. This allowed filmmakers like the Maysles to follow and observe subjects providing the viewer with never-before-seen access to the film's subjects. If the 1960's did not

provide filmmakers with enough technology to create more interesting films, popular culture of the sixties provided filmmakers with a plethora of electrifying subjects. In the late 1950's and early 1960's the Maysles began their documentary style work by following celebrities in a new style of filming called cinema vérité. As explained in Chapter 1 this style of documentary attempted to reveal truth through observation. *Showman* (1963) follows the movie mogul Joe Levine after Sofia Loren won an Oscar for *Two Women*, a film he produced. The Maysles also did a short piece on Orson Welles who traveled to Spain and talked about the current state of cinema.⁴⁶

Television networks began to notice the viability and importance of this new style of footage that bordered on both newsreel and cinematic styles. In 1964 Granada Television hired the Maysles to follow a band called The Beatles for five days as they made their first appearance in the United States. The Maysles received the phone call for the job from the United Kingdom a mere four hours before the Beatles flight landed at JFK Airport in New York City, but the crew was able to make it their in time to catch the hectic reception the band received when disembarking the plane.⁴⁷ The Beatles touching down in the United States would spark the British Invasion that paved the way for bands like the Rolling Stones to become a powerhouse in the music industry and dominate the rock music scene of the late 60's and beyond. Furthermore, the Beatles can be credited with a boom in the music industry that began targeting teenagers and young adults as an emerging

⁴⁶ "Showman," *Maysles Films*, accessed Jan 24, 2016

<http://mayslesfilms.com/film/showman/>

⁴⁷ Joe McElhaney. *Albert Maysles*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 64.

demographic for commercial consumption.⁴⁸ At the same time, the Beatles reinvented what it meant to be a rock star and undoubtedly had a profound impact on the underground, revolutionary rock and roll that came to define the counterculture of the later decade. . It is important to remember that despite the later counterculture's rhetorical opposition of capitalism, the capitalist music industry still had a strong grip on the music scene despite the belief in underground status.^{49,50} In other words, the Beatles opened the music industry's eyes to the potential money that could be made from young listeners and as the counterculture's interest was centered around new music, the music industry began pouring money into underground outlets that ultimately aided in the expansion of a widespread counterculture. Ultimately, the Beatles arrival in the United States, documented by the Maysles in *What's Happening!*, is the beginning of a cultural and industrial change in the music industry that would implode and collapse by the end of 1969.

Although the rewards of cinema vérité were beginning to gain recognition, *What's Happening! The Beatles in the USA* fell short of the success of Richard Lester's *A Hard Day's Night* that was also released in 1964. Unfortunately for the Maysles, little attention was paid to their original release of *What's Happening! The Beatles in the USA*. It seems that viewers preferred to see a Lester's film that included music videos of the Beatles tied together with a loose storyline. It is not surprising, that

⁴⁸ David R. Farber, *The Sixties: From Memory To History*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 161.

⁴⁹ Farber, *The Sixties*, 163.

⁵⁰ Craig McGregor, "Rock's We are One Myth," *New York Times* (New York, NY), May 9, 1971

Lester's film received more attention and acclaim than the Maysles' 74 minute piece did. The Beatles and Rock music in general still had a sense of innocence and naïveté in 1964, in fact *What's Happening!* is a perfect example of this innocence.

Comparing this film to the 1970 *Gimme Shelter*, one can begin to understand how fast and vigorously rock culture of the 1960's evolved. The Rolling Stones were known for their embodiment of sex, violence, and fascination with the devil. Similarly, films about rock music and culture became commonplace as the decade went on and helped perpetuate a certain coolness and aesthetic that is unique to the decade. Still, in 1964 films such as *The First US Visit* were merely ancillary to the mass media's coverage of rock stars. Even the radio had more direct influence on people's ideas about the Beatles has demonstrated by Murray the K in *What's Happening!* who's early quote in the film give's it the original title. In this film and D.A. Pennebaker's *Don't Look Back* (1967) about Bob Dylan overseas, the documentary camera often finds itself in a crowd of other media cameras. At times this borderline newsreel style footage offers the viewer very little insight into the life or personalities of the performers.⁵¹ Instead, these films gain their life and vivacity by transcending performances.

Live performances emerged through the middle of the decade as the centerpiece for the counterculture. Alongside a tumultuous period in history, the music of the sixties had an unprecedented effect on the youth culture. New developments in technology allowed for the establishment of new venues of

⁵¹ Thomas F. Cohen, *Playing to the Camera: Musicians and Musical Performance in Documentary Cinema* (New York/London: Wallflower, 2012), 54.

communication and recreation.⁵² While the decade is too diverse and complex to capture in a single narrative, youth by the mid-sixties had begun to realize their potential for political activism. Music, for many, was an important piece of this protest culture. Sit-ins, love-ins, be-ins, and other gatherings were transforming public spaces into new grounds for social interactions.⁵³ Gathering became a common theme of the counterculture for political reasons or not, paving the way for the music festival to rise to popularity. While music was the main attraction of festivals, the offstage community offered festival attendees an unprecedented sense of cultural identity.⁵⁴ Films did not start to explore the theme of the crowd until Michael Wadleigh's *Woodstock* in 1969, in which the crowd and social environment becomes protagonistic to the narrative of the event. Early documentary work focuses on behind-the-scenes views of celebrities and musicians. For instance, the Maysles' original cut of *What's Happening!* did not include any footage from the *Ed Sullivan Show* but rather the brothers chose to show a family in New York City watching on their home television set.⁵⁵ Even in Apple's 1991 rerelease of this footage as a longer piece entitled *The Beatles: The First US Visit*, the Ed Sullivan material seems out of place against Maysles' more intimate and personal behind-the-scenes time with the Beatles.

Documentary films of rock cinema did not use the audience of a musical performance in the same way that Wadleigh captured the festival attendees of

⁵² Farber, *The Sixties*, 157.

⁵³ Farber, *The Sixties*, 163.

⁵⁴ Timothy, Miller, *The Hippies And American Values* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2011-2012), 49.

⁵⁵ Cohen, *Playing to the Camera*, 61.

Woodstock or that the Maysles did at Altamont. The unique culture of rock music fans of the late sixties undoubtedly provided these filmmakers with some of the most interesting subjects in the history of rock cinema, but the filmmaking styles and inclusion of the diegetic audience is revolutionary for documentary filmmaking of rock music. This is evident by comparing the precursory performance documentary *Jazz on a Summer's Day* (1959) with *Monterey Pop* (1968). Because these films use the same the audience/performer relationship on screen almost a decade apart, it is clear that the audience at Woodstock and Altamont are not only what make the films *Woodstock* and *Gimme Shelter* so intriguing, but also the prowess of these film's directors. *Jazz on a Summer's Day* and *Monterey Pop* focus heavily on the musical performances of their respective festivals; Bert Stern's 1959 film documenting the Newport Jazz Festival in Rhode Island, and D.A. Pennebaker's 1968 film following the events of the Monterey Pop Festival in California.

Though strong focus on musical performances has tremendous stylistic benefits, and would pave the way for later concert documentaries such as *The Last Waltz* (1976) and *Stop Making Sense* (1984), inclusion of a diegetic audience (or audience seen on screen) is structurally imperative for the flow of a documentary film. *Monterey Pop* and *Jazz on a Summer's Day* use the audience as a narrative tool to guide the viewer through a long festival of many acts. In addition, both films show construction and setup of festival grounds, adding a sense of time, place, and setting. However, the treatment of the audience in these films is generally weak compared to the premiere films of 1969-1970. Stern and Pennebaker use the crowd's reactions to show emotion, and while they do this successfully, more

inclusion of the audience is necessary to add an extra layer to these films. Moreover, most of the camera shots of the audience in Stern's film are static shots taken from on or directly in front of the stage creating a critical divide between the performers, audience, and viewer. This is presumably because of the lack of easily portable camera equipment in 1958. By 1967, D.A. Pennebaker is able to include more versatile and dynamic portrayals of the audience that naturally offer the viewer more insight into the experience of attending the festival. Reviews of *Monterey Pop* call the film a musical, and credit Pennebaker for his ability to photograph music, but they do not mention his inclusion of the audience.^{56,57} It seems that Pennebaker was not trying to document a festivalgoer's experience but rather recreate a musical experience that a viewer in a theater could enjoy as a performance on its own.

This aesthetic of editing and portrayal of performances in *Monterey Pop* and *Jazz on a Summer's Day* is very different in intention, style, and function than *Woodstock* and *Gimme Shelter*. While Wadleigh and Maysles' films have more cinematic value through structure, narrative, and personal exploration, the importance of films like *Monterey Pop* should not be overlooked. . *Monterey Pop* serves as a recording of musical performances or a hip newsreel record meant to be shared with a larger audience.⁵⁸ Documentations of musical performances gave people the opportunity to experience these events over and over again after they happened. When films like this gained popularity, they made actual attendance of

⁵⁶ Reneta Adler, "Screen: Upbeat Musical," *New York Times* (New York, NY), December 27, 1968.

⁵⁷ William C. Woods, "Archives Pop," *Washington Post* (Washington, D.C.), March 14, 1969.

⁵⁸ Stephen Mamber, *Cinema Verite in America: Studies in Uncontrolled Documentary* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1974), 180.

the event more valuable as people wanted to experience events that they saw on the big screen. In addition, these films put more pressure on performers to perform well and make their shows desirable. Moreover, the skill of filmmakers to make rock musicians appear cool helped define rock stars and spread the music of these bands to even more listeners.⁵⁹ It is hard to gauge, but one can assume that the Woodstock festival would not have been as “groovy” without earlier films and other documentary style recordings of rock music to help consolidate a culture of youth under a plethora of cool music caught on film.

Woodstock's exploration of a time, place, and culture makes it timeless, while the lack of personal exploration in *Jazz on a Summer's Day* and *Monterey Pop* render these films ephemeral. By 1969 the counterculture that surrounded rock music was well defined, so as preparation for the Woodstock Music and Arts Festival began, filmmaker Michael Wadleigh prepared to capture the crowd as a spectacle and an important piece in his documentation. In addition, Wadleigh had a tendency towards social and political themes so he presumably had the intention of showing the beauty of the unique counterculture.⁶⁰ One can argue that *Woodstock's* great focus on the audience conditions the viewer to react positively to the subsequent musical performances. Conversely, *Monterey Pop* leaves the reaction up to the viewer watching the film as they are left to experience the sights and sounds on his or her own terms.⁶¹ Philip Auslander notes that the purpose of documenting

⁵⁹ Cohen, *Playing to the Camera*, 55.

⁶⁰ Cohen, *Playing to the Camera*, 43.

⁶¹ Daniel F. Schowalter, “Remembering the Dangers of Rock and Roll: Toward Historical Narrative of the Rock Festival,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication*. 17 (2000): 100.

performances is typically for the performance to a larger audience and not to capture the performance as an “interactual accomplishment” between the audience and performer.⁶² Part of what makes *Woodstock* so fantastic is how Wadleigh captures this performance and relationship with the audience. Immediate reactions to the Woodstock festival suggest that the event was a celebration of happiness and unity, so omitting scenes that portrayed this could be a false documentation of the festival. But one must remember that the festival experience portrayed in the film is only the experience of the cameras and cannot be labeled as a definitive memory of the three-day festival.

Documentary film directors and editors have a supreme power in controlling what the viewer ultimately sees and hears. For performance documentaries, the viewer wants to believe that what they are seeing is an accurate depiction of the events surrounding the music, but the extent of the reality is limited to what the camera can capture. *Woodstock* is comprised of camera angles from across the time and space of the festival, and while a general chronology of the three days is kept, the acts are portrayed out of order in the final film. At Altamont the cameras are more limited to the stage and surrounding area and the viewer has less visual-spatial awareness of the festival grounds than *Woodstock* has to offer. If the free concert at the Altamont Speedway were shot with the same camera crew and style as Wadleigh’s *Woodstock*, the viewer’s impression of the festival would be different. Despite criticism from media outlets that they were trying to replicate *Woodstock*, the Maysles filming at Altamont had a different motive.

⁶² Philip, Auslander, “The Performativity Of Performance Documentation,” *A Journal of Performance and Art*. 28 -3 (2006): 6

Albert and David Maysles were focused on personality and more importantly character. Their earliest documentary works followed individuals such as Joe Levine, Yoko Ono, Orson Welles, Marlon Brando, and the Beatles, each film trying to offer the viewer some level of personality or characterization.⁶³ While these films were innovative in style and technique, the lack of structure made it hard for the Maysles to convey the personalities of their subjects. In 1968, however, brothers Albert and David made *Salesman*, which they would later call “the closest to what we wanted to do.”⁶⁴ This full-length feature film was a major transition for the Maysles and Charlotte Zwerin as they developed their cinema vérité skills and constructed a narrative structure. While this film is not about celebrities, but rather lower-middle class Bible salesmen, the Maysles single one character out of the group to become a main character. Without overtly showing or telling the viewer too much about a character’s life, the Maysles are able to convey an organic sense of familiarity with the characters as the film progresses, yet a distance between the viewer and the film’s subjects never ceases to exist.⁶⁵ Expressly, films centered on celebrities like *What’s Happening!* and *Gimme Shelter* convey a certain degree of personality from its subjects, but at the same time the Beatles and Stones are still portrayed as being separate from and (in most cases) superior to their audience. In part, this is because both groups are British, but there is a constant emphasis on the performer/audience relationship, typically reinforced by the stage during performances but also subtly represented in Maysles’ intimate tracking of the band members offstage.

⁶³ McElhaney, *Albert Maysles*, 65.

⁶⁴ McElhaney, *Albert Maysles*, 35.

⁶⁵ McElhaney, *Albert Maysles*, 61.

In *Salesman* the men selling Bibles are portrayed as outsiders who must enter a home and their performance comes in the form of the men's sales pitches instead of a musical performance. The stage in this case is typically a dining room or living room and is a much more familiar setting that offers a more personal feeling to the viewer. Still, when the performance is done, the Maysles choose to show the viewer the salesmen in their suits at the hotel having dull conversation, uncannily similar to the Beatles in *What's Happening!* as they wait in their hotel rooms. When grouped together, *What's Happening! The Beatles in the USA*, *Salesman*, and *Gimme Shelter* show a swift transition and development of documentaries. In 1964, Albert's camera is simply and quietly asking "what's happening? What are the Beatles doing when they step off stage from the Ed Sullivan Show?" By 1968 Maysles' camera is more intently trying to capture the beauty of the everyday; trying to tell a story handpicked out of the world the viewer lives in. In 1970, in full color, many cameras capture time, space, music, and most importantly characters under pressure.

These films are indicative of a time of rapid change, not only in film style and technique but also of culture. *What's Happening!* shows the arrival of a seemingly innocent British band dressed neatly in their matching suits and stealing the hearts of young girls across the country. This innocence was gone long before the free concert at the Altamont Speedway when Alan Passaro's blade entered Meredith Hunter, killing the eighteen-year-old in front of the stage. *Gimme Shelter* captures the dark side of Americans' fixation with rock stars that was essentially launched by

the Beatles arrival in 1964.⁶⁶ This film should be regarded as the beginning of the seventies and not the end of the sixties. What happened in the America in the mid to late sixties that fostered an environment like the free concert at Altamont? How could Woodstock be such a success and Altamont such a failure? While many people question what changed in the four months between these festivals it is important to remember the circumstances that led to each festival, the three thousand miles that separated the festival grounds, and the acts performing at each festival. It is also important not to regard Altamont as an anomaly, but rather Woodstock is an abnormality. The remaining portion of this paper will argue that the counterculture that surrounded rock music in the 1960's ended peacefully during Jimi Hendrix's performance at Woodstock on the morning August 18 and not during the Rolling Stones performance of "Under my Thumb" months later on December 6 at the Altamont Speedway.

By generally framing the 1960's, one can begin to understand the extreme change that took place in the decade. Looking at race relations one can say the sixties started with four young men at a lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina and ended with Meredith Hunter in California. Optimistically one could say the decade started with the election of John F. Kennedy and ended with Neil Armstrong walking on the Moon. Or one can say the decade started with the Bay of Pigs and ended with the My Lai massacre.⁶⁷ The sixties started with Chubby Checker's "The Twist" and concluded on The Doors "The End." Regardless of the way

⁶⁶ Jonathan B. Vogels, *The Direct Cinema Of David And Albert Maysles*, " (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005/2010), 77-78.

⁶⁷ Farber, *The Sixties*, 159.

in which one way frames the decade, it is clear that the sixties started with some level of consensus, that by 1969 had been radically torn apart by internal and external conflict. Out of this conflict, however, emerged one of the most interesting cultures in American history.

David Farber states, “no area of American culture better epitomizes the complicated realities of the sixties than popular music.”⁶⁸ Music is often reactionary to contemporaneous culture or problems and the music of the sixties began to experience a new level of freedom as the prevailing aesthetic of amateurism promoted rock as an outlet for unheard voices.⁶⁹ The music of this decade is part of a complex cultural response to harsh historical conditions such as the civil rights movement and the conflict in Vietnam.⁷⁰ In response to conflict and atrocities that affected the American youth of the sixties, a culture defined by an ethos of love and oneness rose to prominence. While many like to remember this culture as peace, love, and rock or Woodstock hippies, the culture of one was really a collection of many cultures.

‘Please, people, please stop hurting each other.’ The voice is Grace Slick’s and she is trying to cool [fighting] at Altamont. But people have been hurting each other for a long time, they have been hurting each other ever since Cain slew Abel with a Stanley Kubrick jawbone and it is perhaps only this generation of young Americans who have been able to foster the self-delusion that if you turn your back on violence, which Rap Brown thinks is as American as cherry pie, it will, like the boogeyman, simply disappear in a whiff of good vibes and grassmoke, ‘If we’re all one, let’s – well show we’re all one,’ Jagger complains petulantly into the mike, his cloak drooping from his shoulders.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Farber, *The Sixties*, 158.

⁶⁹ Farber, *The Sixties*, 168.

⁷⁰ Miller, *The Hippies and American Values*, 46.

⁷¹ McGregor, “Rock’s We are One Myth,” D15.

This passage comes from a review of *Gimme Shelter* from the *New York Times* in the months following the film's release. Craig McGregor criticizes the counterculture for acting as one, when in reality the predominant ideals that made up the counterculture were often contradictory. Moreover, as much as people like to remember the counterculture for being self-sufficient and removed from mainstream society, the primarily young culture was still utterly reliant on systems and infrastructure of the capitalist society.⁷² In addition, the author also cynically points out that while violence was inevitable, the people of this time with were able to pretend for so long that violence was not the answer. While the counterculture always had a strange connection with the Hell's Angels the violent outburst of gang members at "peace-loving hippies" should come as no surprise. Despite the rhetoric of peace and one the counterculture was an amalgamation of different ideals. The Angels are often vilified regarding the Altamont concert, but the circumstances of Meredith Hunter's death bear a striking resemblance to the four deaths at Kent State only seven months later. Peaceful but persistent festivalgoers (or protesters)walking head-on at a violent opposer – the results are the same. Whether a motorcycle gang or the military, in 1969 violence and death seemed unavoidable in these situations. What *Gimme Shelter* suggests, however, is that neither side of this fight is entirely to blame; instead it may be that those standing between both sides have more of a responsibility. In this scenario that intermediary is the Rolling Stones. The youth culture of the late sixties was headed for an inevitably violent

⁷² Joanne Hague and Brad Littleproud, *Woodstock: Peace, Music & Memories : 40th Anniversary* (Krause Publications: Wisconsin, 2009), 166.

ending, but with their ubiquitous influence, rock bands could have tried to establish some sort of longevity or system that would help the counterculture survive. But *Gimme Shelter* wonderfully poses the question: Is it fair to impose that kind of responsibility on a band simply because of the scope of their influence? By 1969 the counterculture was on its last breaths, clinging on for dear life by December when the first draft lottery was called for Vietnam.

Looking back to McGregor's quote where Grace Slick calls for an end to the fighting in front of the stage it seems self-contradictory for Slick, singer for Jefferson Airplane to ask this when the Airplane sings songs that call for outright revolution. While the band did not support violence their performances and song content became increasingly militant over time, as did many groups' at the end of the decade. For instance, McGregor mentions Rap Brown who was the chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and an active member in the Black Panther Party who was influential in leading groups like SNCC away from their founding principles of nonviolence. The end of the sixties in America became a tangled web of violence and protest that left many of the counterculture's followers disillusioned and lost in the 1970's. In the five years between the Maysles' films (1964-1969) The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1968, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 were passed. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy were assassinated barely two months apart in mid-1968. SNCC changed the "nonviolent" in their name to "national" and dropped nonviolent philosophy as a staple of their success, and hundreds of riots broke out across the nation through the end of the decade.

For the first time in American history people had access to images, sights, and sounds of this domestic and international mayhem through expanding mediums like television and film. While television in the 1950's was used to portray ideal American families and values during the cold war, developments in camera and sound equipment allowed for the development of the documentary field forcing the expansion and availability of newsreel footage.⁷³ The atrocities of Vietnam were broadcast in homes and cinemas across the country as well as the racially charged brutalities in American streets. Between the broadcast of disturbing images of turmoil and cultural strife both domestic and international and the release of performance documentaries about rock music, these forces were catalysts in the solidification of a widespread counterculture of youth in the United States.

While fiery images of war and protest covered the television and theater screens across the country, incendiary performances of musicians like Jimi Hendrix circulated. In the same way that the Maysles' documentaries of the 1960's serve as a frame of American counterculture, by examining Jimi Hendrix's performances at Monterey in 1967 and Woodstock in 1969, once again the viewer can watch rapid change and transformation occur in front of his or her eyes. The importance of studying Hendrix is crucial for understanding the state of the counterculture during his famed Woodstock performance and how this moment in time should be considered the end of the decade and Meredith Hunter's death at the Altamont Speedway should be considered instead the dawn of the seventies.

⁷³ Thomas Patrick Doherty, *Cold War, Cool Medium: Television, McCarthyism, And American Culture* (Columbia University Press: New York, 2003/2005), 105.

Hendrix fame and popularity exploded in 1967 and 1968 after the commercial success of his first album *Are You Experienced?* in 1966. The young African American gained a reputation for his live performances based mostly on his incredible skills on the electric guitar and exciting energy on stage. In D.A. Pennebaker's *Monterey Pop* Hendrix has a vivacious performance characterized by his sexual movements with his mouth and his hips towards his guitar. The crowd, mostly white, is shown at times horrified by his overt sexual behavior in Pennebaker's cut of the festival. Little text exists on the filming and production of *Monterey* but a film *Jimi Plays Monterey* was released posthumously in 1986 using Pennebaker's full footage of Hendrix at the festival. In Pennebaker's original *Monterey Pop* Hendrix makes one of the longer appearances on screen rivaling only Jefferson Airplane and the Mamas and the Papas and it is unclear if Pennebaker filmed Hendrix's performance in its entirety with the intention of releasing a separate film or if the director filmed entire performances of other groups as well. At Woodstock, camera crews saved enough film to capture Hendrix's entire performance because by 1969 Hendrix was one of the highest paid performers and one of the most anticipated.^{74:75} Hendrix's performance at Monterey ended as he fell to his knees and burned his guitar with lighter fluid. This would become one of the most iconic moments in Hendrix's short career.

⁷⁴ Barry Farrell, Liner Notes, *Woodstock 40th Anniversary Edition*, Michael Wadleigh, 1970, DVD.

⁷⁵ Marios Elles, "Chinese Whispers: Jimi Hendrix, Fame And 'The Star Spangled Banner,'" *49th Parallel: An Interdisciplinary Journal of North American Studies* 17 (2006): 4-5.

Looking at footage from *Monterey Pop* and *Jimi Plays Monterey*, it is evident that Hendrix's performance is confident, provocative, well rehearsed, and powerful. Jimi's stage persona was coming into full bloom as he dominates the stage and performance area. Pennebaker's filming from below also puts Hendrix on a pedestal and makes him appear larger and broader than his actual stature granted. Authors like Thomas Cohen believe that the emergence of Hendrix's stage persona at this point in his career was an exploration of freedom that, as Otis Redding does at Monterey. The belief is that black performers of the mid-late sixties were trying to wipe away traces of blackface and undo the stigma of minstrelsy and black performers.⁷⁶ There is opposition to this belief as Jimi's management and record label packaged him for a predominantly white audience.⁷⁷ Robert Christgau called Hendrix a "psychedelic Uncle Tom" for feeding into the industry-controlled music scene and playing for a white audience.⁷⁸ Despite this criticism, Hendrix's performance at Monterey is nothing short of original and fiery.

By 1969 Hendrix would experience a transformation that can characterize the end of the entire American counterculture of the decade. Jimi moved more towards originality and expression with the release of a double album in 1968 *Electric Ladyland*. The Jimi Hendrix Experience was in the midst of its greatest popularity and Hendrix was one of the top billed artists of this time.⁷⁹ By 1969 Hendrix, along with many other artists were beginning to experiment, and though

⁷⁶ Cohen, *Playing to the Camera*, 43.

⁷⁷ Ellos, "Chinese Whispers," 4.

⁷⁸ Robert Christgau, "Anatomy of a Love Festival," *Esquire* January, 1969: 1.

⁷⁹ Ellos, "Chinese Whispers" 3.

the Woodstock Festival in August of 1969 often defines the counterculture, by the summer of 1969 this culture was losing its spark.

Jimi Hendrix has repeated himself ad nauseam; Janis Joplin, who was once the real thing, has sunk into abject self-caricature, screeching and caterwauling at random; the Beach Boys have done nothing; Arthur Brown has taken himself seriously; the Mamas and Papas, Traffic, the Small Faces and Manfred Mann have broken up; and most of the new groups – Led Zeppelin Iron Butterfly, King Crimson, Blood, Sweat and Tears – have been merely embarrassing⁸⁰

Artists like Hendrix and Miles Davis were experimenting in style, sound, and personality in 1969 and a new era was underway. Woodstock then became the last hoorah for those still seeking the collective identity of the music festival, and for those who were not fortunate enough to see the bands of Woodstock perform earlier in the decade, the Woodstock festival seemed like a last chance.

The Jimi Hendrix Experience broke up in June of 1969 and Hendrix began assembling a larger band to play at Woodstock. The final outfit that Hendrix would bring on stage with him during the final performance of the festival would be a six-person band comprised of five black performers (including Hendrix) and Mitch Mitchell on drums. This marked a significant change in Hendrix's style as he was experimenting with other instruments and sounds, in fact Jimi encouraged Larry Lee, the rhythm guitarist, to take more solos as Hendrix wanted to take a step back out of the spotlight.⁸¹ Hendrix was leaning towards a jam-influenced style and if it was not for his unfortunate death in September of 1970 the music he would have made through the following decade could have been unlike anything that he

⁸⁰ Nik Cohn, *Awopbopalooobop Alopbamboom: Pop from the Beginning* (Pimlico: London, 2004), 266-267.

⁸¹ "Director's Cut Bonus Footage: Shooting Stage," *Woodstock (40th Anniversary Edition)*, directed by Michael Wadleigh, 1970. DVD.

produced during the sixties. The band was billed as Gypsy Sun and Rainbows and would later take on the moniker Band of Gypsys. Jimi's management stipulated that Hendrix had to be the headliner and close out the festival as the final performer.⁸²



Hendrix was originally scheduled to go on stage around midnight Sunday August 17th into the morning of August 18th. With rain delays and other unforeseen complications the schedule was pushed

back several hours each day and Hendrix did not take the stage until Monday morning at 9 am. By this time, the massive crowd of 300,000 had dissipated and only an estimated 25,000-30,000 remained for Hendrix's performance.⁸³ As seen in the picture (above), the once full hill at Yasgur's farm was emptied. Many people who remained at the festival Monday morning were still asleep during Hendrix performance. The liner notes of the 40th Anniversary version of *Woodstock* suggest that Wadleigh was saving enough tape to film Hendrix performance in its entirety and that Hendrix and Wadleigh both believed Hendrix would be playing in the dark Sunday night. For Hendrix to take the stage on an overcast morning to a crowd around ten percent of its maximum size is symbolic of the disillusionment that was soon to come for the youth culture of the decade. Gloomy, wet, and tired the party

⁸² Ellos, "Chinese Whispers", 6.

⁸³ Ellos, "Chinese Whispers", 2.

was over for the festivalgoers as Hendrix played the final set of the weekend. The performance is immortalized and remembered by Hendrix rendition of the “Star Spangled Banner,” which is a sarcastic commentary on patriotism and the American spirit in the face of the Vietnam War. While many think this moment is special to Woodstock, Hendrix had been playing the national anthem for around a year and his performance at Woodstock is subpar and noticeably more passive than earlier performances.⁸⁴ Hendrix concluded the set with a cover of “Villanova Junction”, a somber instrumental song that was uncharacteristic of his vivacious performances before he encored “Hey Joe.” Still, the musical prowess of this guitar skill is evident in *Woodstock*, despite the gloomy morning sky that surrounds him. If Hendrix’s changes between *Monterey* and *Woodstock* do not offer enough of a view of last years of the American counterculture, Hendrix and his band members experienced alarming violence abroad in the months following Woodstock. Evidently, large violent crowds surrounding rock music were not isolated to America and the Rolling Stones as Hendrix and company were rushed off the stage after rioting broke out at the poorly planned Isle of Wight Festival and Isle of Fernham festivals.⁸⁵

Music fans and historians alike can appreciate the record of events that Rock Cinema of the sixties as preserved on film. In such a short amount of time, these films convey a remarkable timeline of rapid change and beautiful culture. Through the seventies the documentary form for rock performances would deviate from the cinema vérité style that D.A. Pennebaker and the Maysles brothers used to develop the documentary field into a popular art form. Examining the filmic and narrative

⁸⁴ Ellos, “Chinese Whispers”, 6.

⁸⁵ Ellos, “Chinese Whispers”, 8.

techniques that these filmmakers used to tell stories and depict musical performances can reveal just how remarkable these films are aside from their social importance.

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Chapter 3
Rock Cinema: Setting the Stage
*An Examination of the Performance Space and
Documentary Narrative in Performance
Documentaries*

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Rock Cinema: Chapter 3
 Setting the Stage
 An Examination of the Performance Space and Documentary Narrative in
 Performance Documentaries

In one of the more intimate on-stage performances at the Woodstock Music and Arts festival, Michael Wadleigh's camera captures a young man jump on stage during Canned Heat's performance of "A Change is Gonna Come." The man scaled the twelve-foot wooden fence between the audience and the stage before rushing lead singer Bob Hite. When security comes to remove the fan from the stage, Hite waves them off and embraces the young fan without missing a beat of the song. To the man's request Hite gives him a cigarette and the star struck fan gazes out at the multitude from which he emerged. Dumbfounded, the man sits down and enjoys the remainder of the song seated just feet in front of Hite. Wadleigh catches this entire exchange himself in a *vérité* mise en scène; as the young man enjoys an on-stage performance the camera gives the viewer a similar vantage point. The role of the stage varies strongly from the *Woodstock* experience and other films of the era such as *Jazz on a Summer's Day*, *Monterey Pop*, *What's Happening!* *The Beatles in the USA* and *Gimme Shelter* show other filmmakers use of the performing space.

The cameras proximity to performers and generally omniscient point of view make camera shots from onstage commonplace in performance documentaries. This kind of all-access or VIP camera angles have conditioned viewers of rock documentaries to want this close level of contact with the performers on and off the performing stage. An examination of filmmakers' on and off-stage techniques can uncover the role of the stage in performance documentaries. The stage is the performance space, the center of attention, and an area of excitement. Stages of

festivals and concert venues can dictate important factors like general aesthetics and the audience's engagement with performer. Rock documentaries of the sixties and later decades provide the viewer with a visual history of the stage in various locations and its effect on the performers, the audience, and the performer-audience relationship. Before analyzing the role of the performing stage in various documentaries about rock performances this paper will explain the significance of on-stage footage versus off-stage footage in constructing a documentary narrative and how the events that happen directly around the assembly of these elements can reveal documentary truths. Furthermore, an examination of this will show that the viewer that shifting the performer-audience relationship can be one of the most effective narrative tools for filmmakers of performance documentaries.

This topic is not to be confused with Siegfried Kracauer's criticism of musical performances on film discussed in Chapter 1. Kracauer is opposed the style and tendency of sixties documentarians of rock performances who do not leave the camera on the musicians for the duration of the performance. While some of Albert Maysles' camerawork is close to what Kracauer thinks music on film should look like, Kracauer disapproves of cuts and constant camera movement that remind the viewer they are watching a film and not an actual music performance.⁸⁶ Kracauer's criticism is about the profilmic elements (images on screen) during a performance, but this paper will be discussing how filmmakers of Rock Cinema use musical performances and off-stage footage together to create stories.

⁸⁶ Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (New York: Oxford Press, 1960), 146.

At musical events, whether outdoor festivals, a crowded dive bar, or Madison Square Garden, the performing stage is the center of attention and interest. Musicians appear on stage and the performance they give to the crowd can dictate the spectators' ideas and perceptions of the musician. A performer's performance is an act or an exaggeration of a performer's true self as they are often playing a role or upholding a reputation. Documentaries on rock performances originating in the 1960's rely heavily on concert and performance footage mostly taking place on stages but with the introduction of the new medium of film, performers were not only playing for the crowd in front of them but also for the cameras. Rock musicians have and always will have a persona that they try to convey to their fans that was often continued off stage in radio and television appearances. Direct cinema and the emerging documentary changed the boundaries of the public persona and thus the performing space for musicians on camera became the world. Films that bring the viewer into the lives of these musicians off-stage can, but are not always effective in revealing the true personality of its subjects. But by piecing together the on and off-stage endeavors of these musicians, filmmakers offer the viewer a narrative structured around the musicians and performances, which the viewer is typically already familiar with. In other words, the viewer is familiar with seeing these musicians on stage so assembling a collection of images and sounds that portray them before and after they are on this stage provides the viewer with information that they can process to form new ideas or reinforce existing ideas about the musicians.

Music performances on film started as theatrical and included no documentary footage of performers off stage. *Jivin' in Be-Bop* a 1947 musical starring Dizzy Gillespie recreates a revue and the entire film takes place on a single stage consisting of many acts. While different characters are included and loose plots develop, the film is a series of performances combined in a single film. In early music cinema the static, nonmoving camera of the late forties is supposed to replicate the spectators seated position in a musical theater. Film allowed this performance to be shared in many theaters instead of one. While the viewer never sees an audience in this film, applause is audible between acts that are separated by the opening and closing of the curtain. The stage in this film is the setting for the show as film in 1947 was still recreating the live theatrical experience of plays and other theater performances. The separation between the performers and audience is the film screen, meant to act as the fourth wall in the performance. It was not until camera and sound recording equipment became more portable that music on film became focused on documenting the real instead of recreating it.

Bert Stern's *Jazz on a Summer's Day* is often attributed as the precursor to the performance documentary as his 1960 film documented the performances of the Newport Jazz Festival of the previous year. While the film is comprised primarily of performance footage, Stern incorporates extensive lead-ins to the festival by exploring the surrounding Newport, Rhode Island area and brief scenes of the festival grounds being prepared. The element of establishing setting and revealing the construction of the stage and concert grounds are crucial elements in later films. Camera equipment was portable but not versatile and with syncsound equipment

still rather large, Stern and his five cameras were limited in their mobility.⁸⁷ As a result, the majority of the footage at the festival is shot from between the stage and the audience. Some of the footage is shot from on the stage bringing the performers even with the viewer's eye, which at times feels like a relief. For the most part, Stern captures the musicians from a low vantage point looking. Conversely, the audience is seen from a high angle looking down in nearly all of the audience reaction shots. The limitations of tripods in the days before shoulder-mounted cameras lead to the rigidity and static nature of Stern's camera shots. Still the director does a tremendous job of capturing moving bodies in frame. Stern's background in still photography certainly served him well as he artistically captures the performances at Newport.

His ingenuity as a director is also evident in his off-stage shots. Unlike the performance documentaries that would follow *Jazz on a Summer's Day*, Stern's footage away from the performing stage do not include any of the musicians; instead they are short vignettes of activity in Newport. With the coinciding yacht festival in Newport, however, it is nearly impossible to determine how and if these events are related to the jazz festival at all. These illustrations that Stern shows the viewer are important in the development of performance documentary narrative because as early as 1960, film directors documentaries understood the value of off-stage footage and how building these clips together with performances on stage creates a unique style of story.

⁸⁷ Thomas F. Cohen, *Playing to the Camera: Musicians and Musical Performance in Documentary Cinema* (New York/London: Wallflower, 2012), 23

An exceptional facet of Stern's use of the stage in his film is that he challenges Hollywood's depiction of jazz being an underground, mischievous, and largely black art form. *Jazz on a Summer's Day* shows white and black musicians sharing the same stage and these musicians receiving equally positive reactions from the crowd. At the same time though the stage in context becomes whitewashed, as the setting of Newport is predominately upper-class whites that were fairly removed from the ordinary jazz players. Moreover, despite an integrated stage at the festival, white and black audience members are seldom seen mingling in the film. Perhaps this is because this did not happen in at the Newport Jazz Festival, but more likely Stern did not want to include images like this because they could be controversial.⁸⁸ Despite Stern's revolutionary form of capturing sights and sounds of the Newport Jazz Festival, performances and audience reaction dominate the film, which some critics call boring.^{89,90}

In 1964, brothers Albert and David Maysles released *What's Happening! The Beatles in the U.S.A.* that chronicled the Beatles' first visit to America. The implications of the Maysles film about pop sensations the Beatles would change the nature of the rock documentary, as the shoulder-mounted camera and versatile syncsound equipment developed by D.A. Pennebaker and Richard Leacock at Drew Associates in the early sixties would extend the performance area in rock documentaries off stage and into the world.⁹¹ Deviating from earlier works in

⁸⁸ Cohen, *Playing to the Camera*, 25.

⁸⁹ "Jazz on a Summer's day." *Monthly Film Bulletin* XXVII (1960): 102. FIAF. Web 15 Oct. 2015.

⁹⁰ Phillip Riley, "Jazz on a Summer's Day," *Sight & Sound* XXX (1960-1961): 38.

⁹¹ Cohen, *Playing to the Camera*, 54.

documentary, the camera, now free from the tripod, could follow its subjects in real time. Prior chapters of this paper have examined the content and the cultural and developmental significance of the Maysles' film for the documentary field, but examining the camera techniques of Albert Maysles and the role of the stage in the film one can better understand the narrative function of the stage in later films of the genre.

What's Happening! The Beatles in the USA is a relatively short chronicle of the Beatles first trip to the States, but despite the brevity of the trip the Maysles are keen on structure to tie together their vérité footage.⁹² Similar to newsreel footage, the Maysles observational footage of the Beatles was groundbreaking because it was bringing something exciting into contact with a large audience.⁹³ The Maysles did not want a compilation of newsreel footage of the Beatles; early works by the brothers find the camera lost in a sea of news and paparazzi cameras and this footage offers very little insight into the character of its subjects. Maysles' intent on structure is evident in Paul McCartney's use of a transistor radio throughout *What's Happening!* as he uses it to listen to different radio broadcasts about the band. It is an interesting and creative tool that Albert uses as a narrative device. Still the film remains a loose tale of the band performing and spending time between gigs in hotels.

What makes the Maysles' work so effective is how they structure the on and off-stage footage of the Beatles in *What's Happening!* The original cut of the film was

⁹² Joe McElhaney. *Albert Maysles*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 65.

⁹³ Paula Rabinowitz, *They Must be Represented: The Politics of Documentary* (New York/London: Verso, 1994), 92.

not allowed to include the iconic footage of the band performing on the *Ed Sullivan Show* due to copyright issues, but later releases of the footage utilize the *Ed Sullivan Show* performances to create a stronger narrative. Albert Maysles waits off stage to catch the band as they leave the performance space and enter a world that is utterly obsessed with them. The majority of the backstage material on the band consists of the Brits fooling around in hotel rooms, playfully interacting with the camera. Their clear acknowledgement of the camera lets the viewer know that this is not what they truly act like when nobody is watching. Still, the viewer's interest is kept because the camera is offering them an all-access pass to one of the most popular bands at the time. In a sense the band is acting for the camera; they are portraying their stage personas that people are familiar with for the camera off stage. The camera pointed at a subject undoubtedly has an effect on how the subject acts and many documentary films about musicians face criticism against the subjects' authenticity.⁹⁴ As the camera began to follow rock musicians from the stage and into the world so did the stage personas of these musicians. But, as the viewer is taken from the stage to the world or vice versa, the viewer can form his or her own ideas about the film's subjects around the narrative of performance.

What's Happening! is effective in keeping the excitement of the film equal between the musical performances and the behind the scenes time with the Beatles. Footage from *The Ed Sullivan Show* is recorded on tape and the studio cameras that record this footage are dull, but the electrifying music of the Beatles and the crazed audience make these portions of the film very interesting. In addition, a

⁹⁴ Cohen, *Playing to the Camera*, 17.

performance in Washington D.C. by the Beatles, shot by the Maysles on film, offers a different view of the British band performing on stage. In the first American concert the Beatles played a crowded Washington Coliseum full of screaming fans. The Coliseum was typically a boxing arena and the band was situated in the center of the arena with fans surrounding them on all sides. After each song the band rotated their gear to face a different side of the crowd including Ringo Starr's drum riser. It is unclear whether this was planned or not but the band's reaction appears genuine and their actions onstage in Washington D.C. appear to offer the viewer more about their personality than most of the off-stage appearances in hotel rooms. The performance overall is cordial, and while the fans are extremely excited and scream incessantly for the duration of the performance, fans are seated and organized. Later films will show us how organization and seating arrangement around the stage became less common for rock music shows.

In a special moment of cinema vérité filming, Albert Maysles creatively follows the band and their entourage as they enjoy a night at New York City's Peppermint Lounge. Until this scene the off-stage presence of the band struggles to discover individual identities of the members.⁹⁵ Instead they simply remain four young Brits in suit and tie. The Peppermint Lounge scene is one of the only points in the film in which the band breaks the character they have been portraying to Maysles camera both on and off the performing stage.⁹⁶ Maysles incorporates a number of handheld camera shots; sometimes up over the dancing girls getting an

⁹⁵ Jonathan B. Vogels, *The Direct Cinema Of David And Albert Maysles*, " (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005/2010), 33.

⁹⁶ Cohen, *Playing to the Camera*, 64.

overhead look at the dance floor in quick cuts but also utilizing the long tracking shot showing the dancing girls with Ringo and Murray the K uncut for almost 25 seconds. The Beatles show their personalities here as Ringo dances with the girls but John and Paul are playing it cool sitting at the tables. The scene does not get its power only from the Beatles though, Maysles effectively films and edits a thrilling and arousing illustration of New York's nightlife around the characters of his film. Maysles skillfully assembles images of an uncredited band playing on stage and other quick images of the lounge to create an unprecedented atmosphere in documentary footage and he places his characters right at the center of this party.

What does this scene ultimately reveal to the viewer about the characters of the individual band members? Perhaps they simply are not who we thought them to be, or maybe that they are real people who enjoy fun music and dancing. In this scene we not only see the Beatles removed from the performing stage, but we see them on the other side, as fans listening and reacting to the band and audience. This shifting of roles from their normal position in the performer-audience relationship is what makes this scene so phenomenal in the history of performance documentaries, rivaled only by Mick Jagger and Charlie Watts becoming viewers of themselves in the Maysles editing station in *Gimme Shelter*.

Along with the Maysles brothers D.A. Pennebaker helped establish the rock documentary as a sustainable art form.⁹⁷ Pennebaker's 1967 film *Don't Look Back* chronicles Bob Dylan on tour in Europe and adopts a style of its own. Like the Beatles in *What's Happening!* Dylan faced criticism for acting in front of the camera

⁹⁷ Brian Winston, *Claiming the Real: The Griersonian Documentary and its Legitimations* (BFI: London, 1995), 205.

as he appears to be aloof and pretentious at all times towards numerous reporters and Pennebaker alike.⁹⁸ The style of this film is different because there are few musical performances in the film and it has the feel of a home movie. The few performances we see of Dylan and his friends come backstage so the film is essentially entirely behind the scenes and the performer-audience relationship is between Bob Dylan and the world. Instead of using on-stage against off-stage scenes for a narrative, Pennebaker keeps his camera glued to Bob Dylan at all times off-stage. The famous characters that Dylan encounters and his attitude with foreign journalists and is what make the film so interesting. Because this film lacks the virtuoso performances that the other mentioned films include, these chapters have only briefly mentioned the importance of this film. But in discussing the importance of off-stage material against musical performances, this film demonstrates that the star status of popular musicians is enough of a narrative device and interest point to make a feature film. Using the same cinema vérité techniques of his counterparts, Pennebaker helps solidify the documentary field of the mid-late sixties.

As mentioned in Chapter 2: Maysles in the Sixties, D.A. Pennebaker's *Monterey Pop* (1968) bears striking resemblance to Bert Stern's *Jazz on a Summer's Day*. The content and subjects of the films are quite different and examining the cultures of each are an essential part of the audiovisual chronology of the sixties counterculture. But from a filmmaking standpoint, Pennebaker's 1968 film does not provide the viewer with any new practices in documentary film, which is surprising considering his camera work and style in *Don't Look Back* just a year earlier. Like

⁹⁸ Stephen Mamber, *Cinema Verite in America: Studies in Uncontrolled Documentary* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1974), 179-180.

Stern's film, *Monterey Pop* does not seek to follow musicians or reveal the character of the performers. Instead Pennebaker tries to create a colorful account of the Monterey Pop Festival that could be shown in theaters. Progressing from Stern's stiff and immobile camera shots, Pennebaker employs the shoulder mounted camera to explore the festival grounds more and his off-stage scenes are much closer related to the events that occur on the performing stage than Stern's film. The narrative structure of this film is simply the passing of time as the festival goes from day to night and the viewer is exposed to a host of musical acts.

No film better exemplifies the performer-audience relationship and the effective use of off-stage footage against performance footage as a narrative tool than Michael Wadleigh's *Woodstock*. While Wadleigh's film had more popular success than the other films mentioned in this study, the filmmaker had unfair advantages over other documentarians of the time. Most obviously, the size of the crowd and the colossal fame of Woodstock's performers allowed Wadleigh to construct a final product of nearly four hours of material. Successful documentaries produced before 1970 rarely ran past 90 minutes, yet people still packed theaters to see the lengthy *Woodstock*. Wadleigh also had five cameras to capture the Aquarian exposition and a large crew of assistants to run film stock and other recording equipment across the vast festival grounds.

Wadleigh's biggest advantage for capturing Woodstock on film was a custom-built stage lip specifically designed for camera operators. Associate producer of *Woodstock* Dale Bell had made sure that festival producer Michael Lang made a lip in the front of the stage that was tall enough for Wadleigh and his camera operators

to stand and rest there arms on the stage to get a good vantage point of the performers.⁹⁹ While directors like Stern and Pennebaker may have had special areas to stand and film the performances, the *Woodstock*'s inclusion of a special platform for camera operators was unprecedented. This level of access for the camera coupled with the aggressive nature of Wadleigh's camera makes the placement of the cameras between the performers and the audience symbolic. In some instances the camera is on top of the performers and critics of the film argue that many of the performers were only playing for the cameras.¹⁰⁰ Despite this criticism, the proximity and freedom that Wadleigh and his cameras had yielded tremendous results. Dale Bell talks about the filming advantages of the shoulder-mounted cameras and express access to the stage:

A tripod conveyed none of the energy. A tripod fixed you in a position. The ability for Michael and the other guys to get up on stage...the one sequence with Bob Hite of Canned Heat is one magazine, uncut with the 59 (wideangle) lens. It is just so gorgeous and such an exemplary manifestation of not only Michael's eye and his agility but the cameras ability to register [pause] you know you are right there all the time. It's marvelous.¹⁰¹

Bell is referring to the scene described in the introduction of this paper in which Wadleigh captures a fan rushing Bob Hite on stage in a long uncut sequence. Wadleigh's camera walks up to each member of the band and investigates them like a sniffing dog. This type of camera shot was revolutionary, and for the most part unique to *Woodstock*. This camera work tends to be intrusive and documentarians of cinema vérité like the Maysles and Pennebaker try to observe without intruding or altering their subjects. Where prior documentary filmmakers of performance

⁹⁹ Michael Lang and David Wadleigh, "Director's Cut Bonus Footage: Shooting Stage," *Woodstock (40th Anniversary Edition)*, directed by Michael Wadleigh, 1970. DVD.

¹⁰⁰ Cohen, *Playing to the Camera*, 10.

¹⁰¹ Dale Bell "Shooting Stage," *Woodstock*.

documentaries take the point of view of someone standing side-stage or directly in front of the stage, Wadleigh offers his own point of view. After all, fans of rock music do enjoy being as close to the performers as they can get as proved by the events that transpired at the Altamont Speedway. Wadleigh's camerawork can at times feel invasive, but one cannot blame him for taking advantage of the proximity he had to these artists. Most of the acts on stage seem to enjoy the cameras presence and the images he has captured and preserved on film are vivacious and colorful.

The richness of the images captured so close to the stage make the area on and around the stage a focal point of the film. Early in the film the stage is shown being constructed by a crew as festival preparation is underway. This is an effective narrative tool because it shows the massive green field overlooking the stage and the natural beauty of the scene invites the viewer in for the long, strange trip of the festival. Similarly, Wadleigh includes shots of clean up crews picking up trash from the now brown, barren wasteland in front of the stage. Wadleigh intended for the film to end on this gloomy wasteland but the producers urged him to end with shots of the crowd at its largest.¹⁰²

The film's extensive footage away from the stage area mixed skillfully with performances, sometimes overlapping in split screen or simultaneously over one another, makes the viewer feel as if they are at the festival wandering between campgrounds and the concert area. Wadleigh's narrative is essentially a long parallel-edit in which there are two coinciding narratives: the stage and the festival. Even though there were long breaks between acts spanning up to 4 hours at points,

¹⁰² Dale Bell "Holding the Negatives Hostage," *Woodstock*.

Wadleighs edit makes it feel like the music never stopped. The filmmaker is constantly cutting between activities in the festival grounds (away from the stage) and performances on stage. This gives the viewer the impression that many things are happening at once. What sets *Woodstock's* off-stage footage apart from other documentaries is how the camera does not discriminate between the performers and the audience. In a sense, the cameras were on hand to capture the musical performances but Wadleigh and his team treat the festivalgoers as important subjects in the film. Because of the cultural significance of the event and the variety and breadth of the *Woodstock* footage this film is a remarkable examination of culture and documentary film narrative.

The Maysles' and Charlotte Zwerin's *Gimme Shelter* has an extraordinary narrative for a performance documentary centered around a single moment in time. The film was intended to be a combination of performance footage from a Madison Square Garden show mixed together with scenes from the last month of the Rolling Stones 1969 Tour. When the tour ended with the death of a fan in front of the stage at a free concert in California the film took on a new life. The footage of the concert planning, rescheduling, and locating was now used against radio interviews switching back and forth between present and past to build tension for the duration of the film until the Stones finally take the stage and the viewer can see the moments leading up to Meredith Hunter's death in freeze-frame.

The assembly of the *Gimme Shelter* footage is an astonishing narrative constructed by the Maysles and Zwerin that is so effective because it places the band in unfamiliar positions. The Maysles were fortunate to film the Beatles in the

Peppermint Lounge, which was a reversal of their role in the performer-audience relationship. In *Gimme Shelter* Albert Maysles' camera is intent on Mick Jagger and his notorious stage persona. The film's attraction to Jagger is meant to uncover the persona that many of the viewers were already familiar with. In other words, Maysles tried to reveal Jagger's true character, like Pennebaker in *Don't Look Back*, by keeping his camera lens glued to his subject. Only Maysles is more suggestive with his filming and editing as opposed to Pennebaker's intrusiveness and bluntness¹⁰³. In doing so, the film paints an interesting picture of Jagger as he is put under pressure and forced into new positions.

Jagger and the Stones are shown on a number of stages in the film and we can see the layers of his persona peel back as these stages and areas of performance change. We are introduced to Jagger at Madison Square Garden and his stage performance is well rehearsed, exciting, and provocative. He is able to control the crowd with his movements and his voice. Maysles' extensive tracking shot in "Jumpin' Jack Flash" follows only Jagger to let the viewer know this movie is about him. Directly after the first performance from Madison Square Garden Maysles introduces the viewer to the editing room as Charlie Watts and Mick Jagger listen to radio broadcasts about the failed Altamont Speedway concert. Meanwhile Charlotte Zwerin and David Maysles prepare film for the Stones to review; the viewer does not find out until the conclusion of the film that the negatives Zwerin is loading into the editing station are the last moments of Meredith Hunter's death during the Stones' performance of "Under my Thumb." This placement of on-stage performance

¹⁰³ Amanda Howell, "Performing Countercultural Masculinity: Mick, Music, and Masquerade in *Gimme Shelter*," *Genders* 55 (2012) : 2.

directly next to scenes from the off-stage area that occupies an important chunk of the film does more than establish the settings of the documentary. This technique establishes the parallel narrative that drives the entire film. These areas seem unrelated to the viewer – a stage and an editing lab. But as the film develops it becomes evident that the viewer is seeing two Jaggers.

Jagger's true character is also divulged on the notorious Altamont stage. Because of the poor planning and last minute change of location, the construction for the Altamont Speedway happened virtually overnight. The placement of the stage was towards the bottom of the hill, which forced dancing concertgoers on top of each other and down towards the stage. As Maysles footage tells us, there was not nearly enough parking and when people arrived at the Speedway operations were scattered and unorganized. There is an extended sequence after the Rolling Stones arrive at Altamont in which Maysles' cameras show the festival grounds, but unlike Woodstock that builds excitement by coupling images of the festival with performances and background music, Maysles and Zwerin chose to use the diegetic sounds of the festival. As this goes on, the viewer, along with the attendees become impatient as they are waiting to see the Stones and anticipating the music. The disorder is evident and cars, busses, and people can be seen in masses surrounding the stage. Because the stage is only a few feet off the ground, there are no low angle shots from in front of the stage that elevate the band and Jagger, and instead Jagger is shot from above or the side and he appears small and timid on stage.¹⁰⁴ The small

¹⁰⁴ Thomas M. Kitts, "Documenting, Creating, and Interpreting Moments of Definition: *Monterey Pop, Woodstock, and Gimme Shelter*," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 42 (2009): 727.

stage is seen covered in people throughout the day and it is unclear who belongs and who has made their way on to the platform.

Where most concerts have a clear divide between the performers and the audience, usually reinforced by the stage, Altamont was a mess and the low stage allowed for the audience to interrupt the performing space. In the Altamont scenario, the Hell's Angels fall between performers and audience and their role in the performance relationship is undefined. Because of this the interaction between performers and audience is unfavorable as things became violent between the Hell's Angels and audience members. Audience members try to make their way on stage and at one point, lead singer of Jefferson Airplane Marty Balin jumps off stage and gets knocked out by Hell's Angels. As tensions tightened, more and more Hell's Angels filled the stage and performing area completely altering the usually performer-audience relationship that Mick Jagger and the Rolling Stones are familiar with. Jagger is juxtaposed to the overwhelming masculinity of the leather-clad Hell's Angels just feet from him.¹⁰⁵ Jagger typically had control over the stage, band, and audience, but he finds himself powerless and frightened at Altamont. A viewer seeing this for the first time feels as if they are experiencing the film at the same time as Jagger when Maysles cuts to Jagger in the editing room. These are powerful images placed in a sequence that evoke strong emotion from the viewer.

Maysles filmmaking is distinguished because he does not tell the viewer how to feel about Jagger or the subjects in his films, instead he constructs a narrative that allows the viewer to make their own judgments about the characters as

¹⁰⁵ Howell, "Performing Counterculture Masculinity," 19.

people.^{106,107} As previously mentioned, the final scenes in the editing room when Jagger and Watts finally see the Meredith Hunter incident their role as performers in the performer-audience relationship is reversed as they are viewers of the film and themselves on stage. Another time Maysles captures the Stones shifted from their performing role is in the Muscle Shoals recording studio. In one long take Albert Maysles scans the room watching each member of the band as they listen to their recently cut recording of "Wild Horses." There is no dialogue on the scene at all but the nearly five minute shot gives an unparalleled illustration of a band reacting to their own performance. Albert Maysles is unmatched in how his filming and editing can effectively capture the shift in the performer-audience relationship. He does so in a way that seems natural and organic so the viewer can understand and make conclusions of their own about the films subjects.

These extraordinary moments in time are captured on film by the hardworking filmmakers of this era. Their work has preserved history on film that allows later generations to relive moments and discover truths about the past. The human brain tries to create order out of chaos, but ordering of the commotion of the 1960's is nearly impossible. Some try to neatly organize the decade by numbers and these people are quick to call Meredith Hunter's death at the Altamont Speedway on December 6, 1969 the end of the American counterculture. The life of this counterculture died slowly throughout the final year of the decade as it twisted, transformed, and distorted into something darker, more rugged and quite volatile in the seventies. While many seek to identify the changes that happened between the

¹⁰⁶ Howell, "Performing Counterculture Masculinity," 2.

¹⁰⁷ McElhaney, *Albert Maysles*, 61.

peaceful Woodstock and the violent Altamont, one cannot overlook the beautiful audiovisual history that the expanding documentary field has preserved for eternity. These films offer us images of change at a tremendous rate. *What's Happening! The Beatles in the USA* shows the arrival and emergence of rock stars that made such an impact on the music industry, that an entire enterprise shifted its attention on youth and helped create a widespread counterculture centered on music. *Monterey Pop* shows us how quickly this culture blossomed but also how it sowed the seeds of its own demise. *Woodstock* shows how a little love and a lot of luck can create three wonderful days of music. *Gimme Shelter* introduces viewers and fans of rock music to something new and scary but exciting.

Today nearly everyone attending festivals or concerts records documentary style footage on their mobile phone and social media allows a composite of this footage to be shared as events in real time around the world. In the sixties the availability of this footage was limited but more importantly it was new and it was an emerging art form. Viewing these films together as a chronology or an audiovisual history of events provides tremendous insight into the music, film, and culture of a tumultuous period of American history. The films of this era were an extension of the music and capturing music in this new medium fit quite well. These films ability to not only capture the music, but the culture that surrounded the music is beautiful and offers the viewer a unique look into a unique time in history. Watching films of later decades allows the viewer to see how the rock documentaries inspired later music and overall portrayals of musicians both on and off screen. While they offer rich images and audio of moments in time, these films

often assume the power of dictating people's memories of history. So it is important to remember that the final cut of these films is simply a single experience of an event and not a collective memory of a culture of conflict.

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