

- ARTICLE -

***Gimme Shelter*: Cautionary Tale or Blueprint for a Punk Carnival?**

Peter Stapleton

Abstract

Gimme Shelter (Maysles, Maysles, and Zwerin 1970), which documents The Rolling Stones' 1969 US tour, is widely regarded as the last of the 1960s rockumentaries. Paradoxically, its chaotic final scenes at the band's Altamont concert would also unwittingly provide a blueprint for the 'punkumentary', a subgenre of films that expressed punk's revolt against mainstream rock culture at the end of the 1970s. Drawing upon the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, I wish to describe how the punkumentary's subversion of the rock documentary hinged upon its aesthetic embrace of the very carnivalesque and anti-chronotopic elements, which had torn apart the 1960s counterculture's utopian dream in *Gimme Shelter's* Altamont scenes. In this respect, the punkumentaries destabilise the normative time-space associated with the rock documentary. Moreover, as an aesthetic and political expression of the very phenomenon they document, their subversion of the rock documentary is explicitly embodied.

Introduction

In this article, I want to historicise a critically neglected cycle of the rock documentary, which I will refer to as the 'punkumentary' films that documented the late 1970s/early 1980s punk subculture, such as *The Punk Rock Movie* (Letts 1978), *D.O.A.: A Rite of Passage* (Kowalski 1980) and *The Decline of Western Civilization* (Spheeris 1981). I use the term 'punkumentary' as a derivation of the 'rockumentary', but here my focus will be specifically on the relationship between the punkumentaries and 1960s rockumentaries such as *Dont Look Back* (Pennebaker 1966), *Monterey Pop* (Pennebaker 1968), *Woodstock* (Wadleigh 1970) and *Gimme Shelter* (Maysles, Maysles, and Zwerin 1970). What both subgenres have in common is that they attempt to embody the ethos of the respective subcultures they represent. However, notwithstanding their structural similarities, the punkumentary is very different from the 1960s rockumentary in terms of its content. In particular, I want to explore the

Peter Stapleton is completing his PhD at the University of Otago in the Department of Media, Film and Communication. His thesis title is *The Punkumentary: The Embodiment of a Punk Sensibility Within the Music Documentary*. Peter is also a practising musician and organises the biennial experimental music and sound festival 'Lines of Flight'.

connection between the punkumentaries and *Gimme Shelter*, which follows the 1969 American tour by British rock group The Rolling Stones and is widely regarded to have signalled the death knell of the 'classic' rockumentary. The film's documentation of the tour's final show at Altamont, in which an audience member was murdered by a member of the Hell's Angels motorcycle gang (which had been hired to provide 'security' for the event) would lead to a decade-long reaction characterised by more conservative and tightly-controlled rock documentaries during the 1970s, epitomised by the likes of *The Song Remains the Same* (Clifton and Massot 1976) and *The Last Waltz* (Scorsese 1978). Yet, paradoxically, the struggle for control between audience and performer in *Gimme Shelter*'s Altamont scenes would also, unwittingly, provide a ready-made prototype for the documentation of punk's revolt against the mainstream rock industry and the rock documentary at the end of the 1970s.

Drawing upon Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope and its sub-variant, the anti-chronotopic carnivalesque, I will describe how the punkumentary's subversion of the rock documentary hinged upon what appeared to be an aesthetic embrace of the very anti-chronotopic elements that had torn apart the 1960s counterculture's utopian dream in *Gimme Shelter*'s Altamont scenes. For Bakhtin, the chronotope (literally 'time-space') expresses 'the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature' (1981, 84). He used the concept in a comparison of literary genres, distinguishing their different generic articulations of time and space and the manner in which they were generative of cultural meaning. In this respect, the chronotope binds culture and representation. As Bakhtin suggests: 'out of the actual chronotopes of our world (which serve as the source of representation) emerge the reflected and created chronotopes of the world represented in the work (in the text)' (1981, 253). In this article, I follow Michael Montgomery (1993) and Vivian Sobchack (1998) in transposing Bakhtin's model to the medium of cinema, described by both as uniquely expressive of time and space in its use of devices such as flashbacks, flash-forwards, freeze frames and slow motion.

Here, I want to employ the chronotope in a comparison of historical subgenres of the rock documentary, beginning with an analysis of what Sobchack calls their 'concrete and visible premises' (1998, 130). More specifically, the naturalised chronotopes of the rock documentary, forged within the idyllic/pastoral time-spaces of the 1960s rock festivals, represented in rockumentaries such as *Monterey Pop* and *Woodstock*, become inverted within the screen-world of the punkumentary. In this respect, the latter recalls the Altamont scenes of *Gimme Shelter*, invoking an alternate model of time-space explored by Bakhtin (1984): the anti-chronotopic 'carnivalesque'. In the carnivalesque, to quote Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, the wholeness and unity of established chronotopes disintegrates, 'value is divorced from any specific time

frame, real history is not registered, and space becomes thoroughly fantastic' (1990, 440). In the spirit of the carnivalesque, the punkumentaries embrace an alternative dystopian version of the 1960s, in which the Vietnam War, Altamont, and the Manson Family murders take on a greater constitutive force than Woodstock and the so-called Summer of Love. By perversely drawing on the dark side of the previous decade, diminished and largely avoided in the earlier rockumentaries, the punkumentaries invert the pastoral idyll and, in doing so, subvert expectations of a normative rock documentary time-space.

At the same time, this fantastic expression of time and space stands in uneasy relationship with conventional documentary practice, particularly with observational modes such as direct cinema which, initially at least, espoused a philosophy of 'unmediated' observation.¹ While Stacy Thompson (2004) has discussed punk cinema (including *The Punk Rock Movie*) in terms of its interrelationship between economics and aesthetics, this essay aims to complement the work he has done on the punkumentary's textuality and material dimension. Similarly, in an article examining what he calls 'performative display' within the rockumentary, Keith Beattie proposes that, in contrast to direct cinema's scopic regime, the form of knowledge produced within the rockumentary is 'subjective, affective, visceral and sensuous' (2005, 23). I would suggest that punkumentaries such as *The Punk Rock Movie*, *D.O.A.* and *The Decline of Western Civilization* take the subjective modalities of experience to another level. They both represent (from the outside in) and enact (from the inside out) a punk ethos that is practiced on and through bodies. In that respect, as an aesthetic and political expression of the very phenomenon it documents, the punkumentary's subversion of the rock documentary is embodied through its invocation of the carnivalesque body, in which 'the confines between bodies and between the body and the world are overcome' (Bakhtin 1984, 317).

Gimme Shelter

Although *Gimme Shelter*'s concluding scenes devolve into anti-chronotopic chaos, the film is initially expressive of the idyllic time-space familiar from rockumentaries such as *Monterey Pop* (Pennebaker 1968), and *Woodstock* (Wadleigh 1970). For example, the earlier concerts on The Rolling Stones' American tour enact a spatially expansive, communal and above all celebratory time-space, onto which can be read the 1960s counterculture's utopian ideals for the future. The film also reproduces the festival rockumentaries' representation of the onscreen concert audience as the metonymic equivalent of the counterculture, equal at least to the musicians as social force, documentary subject, and visible spectacle. Through sound bridges and shot reverse-shot structures, it enacts utopian relations between the performers and the film's two

audiences: at the concert and in the cinema. The film's concert scenes from earlier in the tour offer the cinematic spectator a fluid reciprocity of viewing positions, allowing him/her a simulated version of the live rock concert experienced both from the stage and the space of the audience. At the same time, while *Gimme Shelter* reproduces the focus on the audience as counterculture inaugurated by the festival rockumentaries, it also restores the fixation on the individual rock star that had been a feature of the earlier rockumentary *Dont Look Back's* treatment of Bob Dylan. It does so by offering the cinematic spectator a privileged behind-the-scenes intimacy with Rolling Stones' lead vocalist Mick Jagger watching playbacks of the film's documentary footage in the filmmakers' editing booth.

As the Rolling Stones' tour progresses, *Gimme Shelter's* fascination with Jagger's persona begins to displace its concern with broader countercultural unity. The intensification of mediated intimacy between Jagger and the cinematic audience is paralleled by a growing frustration on the part of concert audiences represented within the film, who, increasingly attempt to breach the boundaries of the stage. The idyllic time-space of the 1960s rockumentary comes under threat and in the film's Altamont scenes it finally becomes inverted. Despite Jagger's evocation of Woodstock when promoting the free concert in media interviews and his suggestion that the event is really just an excuse for people to 'get together and, like, talk to each other and sleep with each other and ball each other', the overriding sense becomes one of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. In so far as the earlier rockumentaries were located in serene, apparently natural surroundings, the Altamont site is normally a speedway, with car noise and petrol fumes the antithesis of the pastoral idyll.

From the cinematic spectator's first glimpse of the festival site, as The Rolling Stones and their entourage arrive by helicopter, the space is chaotic and overcrowded. The moment Jagger steps out of the helicopter, an unknown assailant punches him in the face. The under-motivated nature of this random act seems to tap into the cumulative tension that has been building between the singer and concert audiences throughout the tour, while also serving as an omen of greater violence to come. Earlier in the afternoon, during a performance by support band The Jefferson Airplane, the normal spatial architectonics of the 1960s rock concert have already so degenerated, with the Hell's Angels attacking fans who attempted to climb on to the stage and even knocking out Jefferson Airplane vocalist Marty Balin when he tries to intervene, that the event is barely able to continue. From this point on it is the audience rather than the band that is the main focus of the film's attention. When the filmmakers venture into the audience prior to the show, there hardly seems space to breathe amongst the freak-outs and violent attacks on audience members by the Hell's Angels. Indeed, the film's close-up handheld camera footage of events within the audience, in which the

instability of the handheld camera translates into a shaking of the cinematic frame, expressing the exposure of the cameraperson (and by proxy the cinematic spectator) to a physically threatening situation.

As a result, there is a feeling, even before The Stones take the stage, that the filmmakers (and the film's spectator) have already distanced themselves from the concert audience. Despite Jagger's evocation of Woodstock as a template for Altamont when promoting the upcoming concert in media interviews, the aura of countercultural community and solidarity has disappeared. Tightly framed shots of the audience in front of the stage emphasise the increasingly constricted nature of the space. In addition, the frightened but resigned expressions on the faces of many within the audience suggest that there is no outside. As both space and time contract, the only focus is on events in the immediate present, recalling Bakhtin's description of the carnivalesque: 'While carnival lasts there is no other life outside it. During carnival time life is subject only to its own laws' (1984, 7). Furthermore, the frequency of the interruptions and the disturbing randomness of the violent outbreaks work against the normal rhythms of the rock documentary. At the same time, the cutaways to Jagger watching playbacks of footage from the concert in the filmmakers' editing booth only reinforce the constricted temporality of audience members who don't enjoy the benefit of this reflexive distance. By contrast, both Jagger and the cinematic spectator already know the outcome. Initially at least, the cutaways also provide the spectator with a viewing position identified with that of The Rolling Stones' singer at a safe distance from events on the ground and from a concert audience increasingly represented as alien and Other.

Most striking is the incoherence of affect among members of the Altamont audience, which cuts against any sense of a shared countercultural ethos. While the Stones are playing 'Sympathy for the Devil', many in the audience seem more concerned with what is happening immediately around them. There is a shot of a woman laughing while another cries sullenly by her side. Another shows a man grooving happily along to the music while someone beside him frowns and shakes his head as if in disgust. A naked woman with a crazed expression on her face stumbles blindly through the crowd and tries to climb over other people in a vain attempt to reach the stage. Indeed, *Gimme Shelter's* montages of audience faces most resemble a Bosch painting, a descent into hell, but here each audience member is isolated within his/her own private hell. The relationship between people is the antithesis of community. Lorded over by the brooding and menacing presence of the Hell's Angels, all they have in common is the space into which they have been thrown and a shared fascination with Jagger that pits them against one another in their clamour for the stage. Gone is the easy reciprocity of viewing positions exhibited in the film's earlier scenes. Instead, the camera

increasingly hides behind the band. On a stage overrun by Hell's Angels and other audience members, The Rolling Stones become increasingly hard to distinguish. With darkness closing in, the onscreen contraction of time and space accelerates. Increasingly, the main focus of the camera is on a small section of the audience directly in front of the stage, in which uncontrollable violent, racial, and libidinal forces are unleashed.

Up till then Jagger has been portrayed, not only as a performer, but also as The Rolling Stones' de facto image director, as well as co-creator of the film itself in the 'editing booth' scenes. However, *Gimme Shelter* ultimately undermines any construction of a safe outside from which to control its images. Jagger's fall from grace is expressed most powerfully in the film's first cutaway to the filmmakers' editing booth soon after the beginning of the Altamont performance of 'Sympathy for the Devil'. After barely thirty seconds, fighting breaks out between the Hell's Angels and the audience as Jagger implores the crowd: 'Brothers and sisters, brothers and sisters, come on now that means everybody just cool out'. However, his voice sounds increasingly unsure and as he repeats his plea it becomes clear he no longer has the power to stop the mayhem. The Stones resume their performance but the camera's attention is more focused on events offstage. Although Jagger jokes nervously with the audience, his speech and lyrics are rendered ineffectual. His loss of power is reaffirmed in a subsequent scene, when, following the murder of Meredith Hunter by a member of the Hell's Angels, the film cuts once again to the editing booth. He has just threatened to stop the show, but then states that the band will continue if people sit down. At that moment, Jagger's off-screen voice can be heard saying, 'Can you roll back on that David?' The film then cuts to the editing booth where the scene is reframed on the monitor and rewound as Albert Maysles points out both the gun in Hunter's hand, and the knife as it is plunged into his back. The moment is captured in a freeze frame, but Jagger is no longer in control of the process.

The Stones' departure by helicopter, crowded to capacity while others are shunted aside, anticipates the televised evacuation of the US embassy in Saigon, Vietnam in 1975. Since the camera crew (and the cinematic audience by proxy) arrived by helicopter with the band, the expectation is that 'we' will join them in departing, but instead the doors close on the camera and the helicopter pulls away. The outsidersness of the cinematic audience relative to the event is thus revoked, as we are left abandoned in a misty, dark, litter-strewn field in which drug-addled figures stumble about like zombies. The sequence is followed by another cut back to the editing booth. As Jagger gets up to leave, the film freezes on a close-up of his face. At that moment he is objectified as a static image no longer constructed for his own consumption. Up until then the singer had been portrayed as a mercurial creature of change, adopting

different personae to suit the song being performed, but the fixity of his image seems to cancel his powers of self-transformation. He appears incapable of motion, subjected to the scrutinizing movement of the film through an extreme close-up on his face as it undergoes a protracted cross-dissolve over shots of the concert audience as it trudges wearily away from the Altamont venue the following morning. Jagger's now-spectral image presides over the fragmented diaspora, but he cannot distance himself from the events of the previous night. While he had attempted to control this world from outside, he cannot remain so safely removed.

The Punkumentary

Although spelling the end of the 1960s rockumentary, the Altamont scenes of *Gimme Shelter* would, unwittingly, provide the prototype for films such as *The Punk Rock Movie*, *D.O.A.: A Rite of Passage* and *The Decline of Western Civilization*. These films not only document, but also express punk's revolt against 1960s/1970s rock culture. In fact, it is because of their embodiment of what might be called a punk ethos that I term them 'punkumentaries'. Through what appears to be an aesthetic embrace of the very carnivalesque and anti-chronotopic elements that marked the end of the 1960s counterculture's utopian dream in *Gimme Shelter*, they subvert and invert what had become the generic expectations of the rockumentary subgenre. In sharp contrast to the idyllic/pastoral time-spaces of 1960s rockumentaries such as *Monterey Pop* and *Woodstock*, reproduced in mainstream 1970s rock documentaries such as *The Song Remains the Same*, the punkumentaries are grounded in cramped, overcrowded and claustrophobic urban punk clubs, such as the Roxy in London or the Masque in Los Angeles. Where scenes in the festival rockumentaries depict the warm glow of the afternoon sun shining down on smiling concertgoers, the clubs' interiors are dark and shadowy, the subjects pale as if drained of blood. Close-up shots focus on grimy walls covered in punk graffiti, both an expression of punk's materiality and a means by which the locations are marked and therefore 'converted' into premises for the show. Moreover, not only space, but also time, contracts. Above all, these are temporary places, only momentarily animated by what occurs inside.

This fleeting spatio-temporality is literally embodied in a scene from *The Decline of Western Civilization*, which documents a live performance by the Los Angeles punk group X. Following the off-screen sound of a count-in and the first bars of the song's repetitive riff, the film cuts abruptly to a close-up focus on the Club 88 audience. The spatial demarcation between the stage and the space of the audience, so carefully inscribed in other subgenres of the rock documentary, has been erased. The collapsing of boundaries extends to the cinematic spectator who is trapped along with the concert audience in a space from which there is no outside. The audience members are little

more than a blur of fragmented, disconnected faces and bodies. Close-up shots and tight framing ensure that the audience members are a single writhing mass of body parts, rather than individuals, invoking the depersonalised nature of the grotesque body, which, according to Bakhtin, 'outgrows its own self, transgressing its own body' (1984, 317).² This depersonalisation is reinforced audio-visually by the machine-like repetition of the song's insistently grinding riff. Moreover, the sudden movements of the handheld camera, which translate into a shaking cinematic frame, not only evoke the 'nausea' of the lyric, but also convey the imperilment of the spectator within this carnivalesque time-space.

I would like to suggest that what is happening in this scene involves more than representation. Rather, mediation seems to cross the barrier of the screen and generate a bodily response in the cinematic spectator, who is given no choice but to inhabit a chaotic punk time-space. In this respect, the punkumentaries' subversion of the rock documentary takes on an explicitly embodied expression. In so far as the structure of the film experience brings the spectator close, while also keeping them at a distance, punkumentaries such as *The Decline of Western Civilization* play on that distance, but also undermine it. At the same time, scenes such as X's 'Nausea' foreground the embodiment of film itself. They emphasise the point that Vivian Sobchack makes when she refers to 'the embodied nature of vision, the body's radical contribution to the constitution of the film experience' (1995, 25). The cinematic spectator is caught in a dialogue between the transcendence of film (seeing through a character's eyes, sharing their subjectivity) and the immanence of the body (the body as object). As such, the punkumentaries both represent (from the outside in) and enact (from the inside out) a punk ethos that is practiced on and through bodies.

The immanence of the body is also conjured in the abruptness of the editing, the disruption of the 'normal' rhythms of the rock documentary again recalling the Altamont scenes of *Gimme Shelter*. *The Punk Rock Movie*, for example, cuts unexpectedly from its opening titles to the middle of an overcrowded room, in which the Sex Pistols are preparing to play 'God Save the Queen.' Immediately following the conclusion of the song, there is an equally abrupt cut to a credit sequence, disturbing any sense of smooth continuity. The abruptness of the editing is mirrored in the sonic structures of the music, which combine to give the impression that space is collapsing inwards. The songs are short, sharp, and fragmentary. They disrupt through abrupt beginnings and their refusal of familiar pop hooks and satisfying choruses. Recorded via relatively lo-fi recording equipment in both *The Punk Rock Movie* and *D.O.A.*, the level of the volume translates as borderline distortion, matching the visual distortion of the films' pixelated screens. In *The Decline of Western Civilization* the music tends to have a careening quality, a sense of everything being out of control in correlation with

the chaotic spatio-temporality of the live punk show. Furthermore, the edginess and heightened immediacy bring to mind the consciousness-altering effects of speed, the main drug of choice in punk scenes, which stimulates the embodied experience of the moment.

Punk's mode of embodiment is also seen in the performance of boredom, or what Dick Hebdige describes as 'blankness' (1979, 28), made tangible by a lack of emotion in the voice and an absence of bodily expressiveness. In the punkumentary, boredom is part of an onscreen incoherence of affect that finds precedent in *Gimme Shelter's* Altamont scenes. Yet, where in *Gimme Shelter* boredom is portrayed more as a stunned response in the face of unsettling forces, here it is embraced. In addition, to quote Lars Svenson, 'boredom always contains a critical element, because it expresses the idea that either a given situation or existence as a whole is deeply unsatisfying' (2005, 22). In that respect, where Lawrence Grossberg suggests that 'the most devastating rejection of a particular rock and roll text is to say that it is "boring"' (1984, 233), the punk performance of boredom challenges everything that rock culture holds true. Connecting the punk time-space to affect also foregrounds one of the principle forms of identification between audience and performer. Additionally, it not only highlights punk's subversion of the codes of rock culture, but also the divergent ways in which they are documented. For example, boredom was just as likely to have been part of the lived experience of audiences at 1960s rock festivals such as Monterey or Woodstock, but in the rockumentaries it is depicted as meditation or contemplation. By contrast, in the punkumentaries it is a recurring anti-chronotopic motif locating punk within the 'vacancy' of a meaningless and endlessly repetitive present.

Punk's vacancy is also expressed in the pogo dance. Far from being an uninhibited expression of pleasure or desire, the pogo is a constricted parody of dance. Footage from *The Punk Rock Movie* and *D.O.A.* shows blank-faced, expressionless dancers bouncing up and down on the spot, arms held rigidly by their sides, with literally no room to move. In the context of American hardcore, the pogo mutates into the free-for-all slam dance, in which any semblance of a dance is replaced by a ritual of mock (and at times actual) violence. Both the pogo and the slam dance invert the recurring chronotopic motif of the rock documentary whereby shots of individual 'fans' dancing freely purport to show the affective investment of the audience in the documented live music. Both forms subvert the traditional idea of dance as the symbolic coming together of two people in a courtship ritual. As parodies of traditional dance, they also embody punk's perverse ambivalence about sex, by extension enacting punk's rejection of core dominant culture institutions such as marriage and the family, with the implication that in a world that has no future the rituals of courtship have become redundant.

Another example of the punkumentary's expression of an ethos practiced on and through bodies is a scene from *The Punk Rock Movie*, in which two audience members shoot up in a toilet at the Roxy. The door is left wide open and a medium close-up shot reveals two people, a man and a woman, inside. The woman produces a plastic bag containing a white powder and the man fills a syringe before injecting. The ritual appears to be performed *for* the camera, which moves in to an extreme close-up. The toilet cubicle has barely enough room for two people, but the closeness of the filming means that the cinematic spectator is also confined within the stifling space. As onscreen space contracts, so too does time. Filmed in extreme close-up, the body is depersonalised, reduced to pierced and mutilated parts. The scene inverts one of the chronotopic motifs of festival rockumentaries such as *Monterey Pop* and *Woodstock*, in which drugs such as LSD and marijuana are portrayed as consciousness expanding and as affirming a utopian countercultural solidarity and community. Here, by contrast, the ritual of shooting up is portrayed as privative and anti-social. In terms of a punk time and space, it signifies a desire to get 'out of it', not to belong here or for that matter anywhere. The scene also parodies the rock documentary trope of the backstage, as a place where, in Jonathan Romney's words, the viewer might see the artist revealing 'his or her true self' (1995, 83). Where *Dont Look Back*, for example, allows the cinematic spectator privileged behind the scenes access to Bob Dylan, here the cinematic spectator is permitted entry but then, rather than the rock star, is forced to watch two junkies injecting themselves.

The ambivalence of the afore-mentioned scene serves as a reminder that punk was always ambivalent about itself. For example, to call oneself a 'punk' implies willingly adopting a term that connotes sexual degradation.³ Whereas Mick Jagger employs the inclusive language of the 1960s counterculture in addressing the Altamont audience ('brothers and sisters, brothers and sisters, why are we fighting'), the language of punk is profane. Rather than the irony of a counterculture that breeds its own antithesis, the overriding atmosphere within the punkumentary is one of mockery and self-parody. From the opening scene of *The Punk Rock Movie*, in which an audience member abuses The Sex Pistols' vocalist Johnny Rotten⁴ with 'you fuckin' wanker', to which he replies, sarcastically, 'fuckin' old hippies all over again'. Paradoxically, words and expressions that would otherwise be considered hostile become terms of endearment and solidarity. In this way, the language of punk recalls Bakhtin's description of the medieval 'culture of folk humour' in which 'abusive words are used affectionately, and mutual mockery is permitted' (1984, 16). The exchange of abuse is at its most extreme in the final scene of *The Decline of Western Civilization*, three years on from the beginnings of British first-wave punk and documenting an environment in which the threshold to shock is now much higher. The scene features a live performance by the Los Angeles hardcore band Fear. It begins with a prolonged exchange of verbal abuse

between the audience and onstage performers, which culminates in an all-in brawl, with bodies strewn across the stage. Eventually the band launches into 'I Don't Care About You' with the hook-line [shouted]: 'I don't care about you. Fuck you' as onscreen space descends into chaos and anarchy. Once again, punk's confrontation is enacted cinematically, the spectator forced to become a participant as the sudden jolts to the handheld camera in the middle of the dancing/fighting audience convey a sense of being jostled and assaulted in the chaotic and overcrowded space.

As the previously sacrosanct spatial boundaries of the rock documentary are broken down, established hierarchies become inverted. This inversion is literally embodied in the ritual whereby the audience spits ('gobs') on the punk performer, in a way redolent of the 'uncrowning' (or 'discrowning') of the king, first 'elected by all the people' then 'mocked by all the people' (Bakhtin 1984, 197) in the carnivalesque. Johnny Rotten may be the closest thing to a punk star, featured as a performer in *The Punk Rock Movie* and *D.O.A.*, but he is mostly represented (and presents himself) as a jester who cannot be taken too seriously. In so far as *Gimme Shelter* positions Mick Jagger as The Rolling Stones' image controller and, at least initially, as co-creator of the film itself, Rotten is positioned throughout as someone who undermines from within. Indeed, his adopted persona recalls Bakhtin's description of characters such as 'the rogue, the clown and the fool . . . who laugh not just at others but at themselves' (1990, 436). His role is encapsulated in the Sex Pistols' retrospective *The Filth and the Fury* (Temple 2000), which includes footage from both *The Punk Rock Movie* and *D.O.A.*, and in which his voiceover narration articulates punk's rejection of both 1970s rock culture and mainstream society as a whole. In the film, Rotten is just as cynical about his own role as media-appointed punk 'spokesperson'. His cynicism comes to the fore in the film's footage of the band's final concert at the Winterland Ballroom in San Francisco when, as the final bars of a loose, extended cover of The Stooges' 'No Fun' lurch to a halt, he inquires 'Ever get the feeling you've been cheated?' not only making fun of his audience, but also himself and the entire punk project. In a moment that recalls the captured still image of Jagger in *Gimme Shelter*'s penultimate scene, Rotten's sardonic expression momentarily appears to meet the camera's eye. However, in contrast to Jagger's frozen discomfort, the punk anti-star is mockingly humorous, his tone reminiscent of what Morson and Emerson call the 'laughing truth' of the carnivalesque (1990, 433), again implicating the cinematic spectator and refusing any sense of a safe outside.

Conclusion

Where *Gimme Shelter*'s Altamont scenes document a seemingly helpless descent into a nightmarish world of the carnivalesque, with no one having the power to control the

events that transpire, late 1970s/early 1980s ‘punkumentaries’ such as *The Punk Rock Movie*, *D.O.A.: A Rite of Passage* and *The Decline of Western Civilization* perversely and intentionally invoke that carnivalesque world. They not only document punk’s revolt against rock culture, but, through an aesthetic embrace of the anti-chronotopic and carnivalesque elements that had torn apart the 1960s counterculture’s utopian dream in *Gimme Shelter*, they subvert and invert what had become the dominant chronotopes of the rock documentary. From their very first frames, the punkumentaries destabilise expectations of a normative, generic rock documentary time-space. Moreover, as an aesthetic and political expression of the very phenomenon they document: a punk ethos that is practiced on and through bodies, their subversion of the rock documentary takes on an explicitly embodied expression. In this respect, punk’s confrontation is enacted cinematically, with a real sense that the mediation can cross the barrier of the screen and generate a bodily response in the spectator. The cinematic spectator trusts he/she will be viewing events from a safe outside, but, as in *Gimme Shelter*’s Altamont scenes, any sense of safety is undermined. The punkumentaries refuse entry to their world except on condition of entering the punk carnivalesque and becoming subject to its chaotic spatio-temporality. Whether the spectator likes it or not, he/she is forced to become a participant.

Notes

1. 1960s rockumentaries such as *Don’t Look Back* and *Monterey Pop* (both D.A. Pennebaker), and *Gimme Shelter* (Albert Maysles and David Maysles) were made by filmmakers associated with the early phase of the direct cinema documentary movement.
2. Bakhtin emphasises that the grotesque body ‘is not the body and its physiology in the modern sense of these words, because it is not individualized’ (1984, p.19).
3. Punk’s ambivalence about itself is also evidenced by group names such as The Slits and The Circle Jerks.
4. As in the carnivalesque, many punk performers are so-named because of their alleged physical characteristics e.g. Johnny Rotten’s rotten teeth, Rat Scabies’ ‘ratlike’ features.

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