



PROJECT MUSE®

---

Through the Lens, Darkly: Peter Whitehead and The Rolling Stones

Victor Coelho

Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media, Volume 52, Number 1, Spring 2011, pp. 170-191 (Article)

Published by Wayne State University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/frm.2011.0010>



► For additional information about this article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/456509>



Figure 1. Bill Wyman in *Charlie Is My Darling*, 1966



Figure 2. *Charlie Is My Darling*, 1966



Figure 3. Filming in the sixties



Figure 4. Filming the Stones, *Charlie Is My Darling*, 1966



Figure 5. Mick Jagger in *Charlie*, 1966



Figure 6. Whitehead with Keith Richards, *Charlie*, 1966



Figure 7. Whitehead with Mick Jagger, *Charlie*, 1966



Figure 8. Carolee Schneeman in performance in New York City, 1966. Photo by Peter Whitehead, shot during the time he was making *Charlie Is My Darling*. Courtesy of Carolee Schneeman.

# **Through the Lens, Darkly: Peter Whitehead and The Rolling Stones**

**Victor Coelho**

Despite their seminal importance in rock history—institutionally memorialized as Rock and Roll Hall of Fame laureates; economically powerful for almost half a century through outstanding market success and clever product and tour management; and, most important, for the durability of their roots-derived musical template—The Rolling Stones have never been the recipients of a detailed examination commensurate to their musical influence and cultural range. Academic surveys of rock music, typically organized by album or a genre-based chronological narrative, usually conclude their discussion of the Stones' music in the 1970s, thus ignoring the cyclic and dynamic processes of revival, the powerful communities created by downloading and sharing, the new listening and viewing strategies enabled by mobile technology, YouTube, and remixing—all of these the main ingredients, I would argue, for determining long-standing cultural significance in popular music.<sup>1</sup> And while the foundational musical role played by the Stones during the English blues revival of the early 1960s is an unalterable part of the group's history, the question remains of how and why the blues—a moribund, culturally distant, and racially distinct vernacular music—became a point of reference for the synthetic, materialistic, and evanescent culture of London during the early sixties. To answer this, we need to consider the refraction of The Rolling Stones—the group and its music—that took place through the “third-party” industries of art, film, and popular fashion. Peter Whitehead's close and complicated relationship to the group during the 1960s and early 1970s, as chronicled through many completed and proposed projects, has left a fascinating documentary paper trail that offers valuable insights into these questions.

\* \* \*

### ***Performer, Audience, Cultural Critic***

What I call “third-party” is a crucial stage in the circuit of representation since it visually “translates” music into culture. Performers, as the “first party,” are traditionally reluctant about ascribing meaning to songs and making pronouncements about their cultural significance. Bob Dylan, uncomfortable with the sobriquet attached to him as “The Voice of a Generation,” remembered in his *Chronicles* that in 1968,

All I'd ever done was sing songs that were dead straight and expressed powerful new realities. I had very little in common with and knew even less about a generation that I was supposed to be the voice of. I'd left my hometown only ten years earlier, wasn't vociferating the opinions of anybody. My destiny lay down the road with whatever life invited, had nothing to do with representing any kind of civilization.<sup>2</sup>

More bluntly, following the release of the Stones' 1971 album *Sticky Fingers*, Keith Richards similarly minimized the alleged meanings (in this case, references to drugs) that became attached to his songs: “I don't think *Sticky Fingers* is a heavy drug album . . . I mean, you can't take a fucking record like other people take a Bible. It's only a fucking record, man.”<sup>3</sup> In short, the consideration of cultural meaning is usually not of primary importance by new groups. But, at the same time, rock musicians can no longer retreat to the studio and avoid public scrutiny or interpretation, as The Beatles did in 1966, and enclose themselves within the privacy of their technology. Instead, the music and lyrics of performers are now categorized and classified, interpreted aesthetically, and judged subjectively by a global “second party” consisting of consumers and fans. This level is where selection, discernment, and community take place: it represents the choices and commentary made by listeners of the music, with many variants of personal uses and listening strategies. This “second party” has now branched into powerful communities, active in sharing, distributing, and blogging, and constituting both the economic and fan base of the group.

Where the translation of popular music into *culture* occurs at an immediate level is with the “third-party” experience that captures both the group and its fan base. The most powerful method by which The Rolling Stones have been mounted as culture and, indeed, as cultural critics—to be sure, almost always without the endorsement of the group—is through the lens of filmmakers. In addition to Peter Whitehead, whose 1965 film *Charlie Is My Darling*, which documented the group's two-date tour of Ireland, was the first true film of the band, many other notable filmmakers have used The Rolling Stones as subjects over the last forty years, including,

- Jean-Luc Godard's Black Marxist and revolutionary context for the composition of “Sympathy for the Devil” (*One Plus One [Sympathy for the Devil]*, UK, 1968)

- The Stones' own sardonic view of themselves as a circus act in Michael Lindsey-Hogg's *Rock and Roll Circus*—an anticipation of their self-fashioning as “exiles” a few years later—in 1968
- Leslie Woodhead's painful capture on film of the group's “requiem” concert at Hyde Park only days after Brian Jones's death (*Stones in the Park*, UK, 1969)
- The Maysles brothers' documentary of the 1969 tour—the Stones' first in three years—and the group's confrontation with a violent, divided America, dissonant with the bucolic harmony of Woodstock earlier that year (*Gimme Shelter*, US, 1970)<sup>4</sup>
- Robert Frank's road chronicle of voyeurism, sex, narcotics, and moral bedlam during the 1972 tour (*Cocksucker Blues*, US, 1972)
- The 1972 concert film, *Ladies and Gentlemen: The Rolling Stones*, which—anticipating IMAX by fifteen years—was intended to bring the concert experience to movie theatres
- Hal Ashby's film of the 1981–1982 stadium shows, with its pastel, Americana-themed sets designed by Kazuhide Yamazaki (*Let's Spend the Night Together*, US, 1983)
- French director Philippe Puicouyoul's 2008 “second-party” video blog of The Rolling Stones “nation,” entirely narrated and filmed by fan informants from around the world<sup>5</sup>
- Martin Scorsese's late-style homage to the band, *Shine a Light* (US, 2008)<sup>6</sup>

Whitehead, Godard, Woodhead, the Maysles, Frank, and Puicouyoul all made documentaries, some using cinema vérité techniques, others shooting live concerts, but none placing primacy on the actual concert footage. Non-musical scenes in these films are just as frequent, if not more so, than musical ones, dealing with the spontaneity of press and fan interviews, backstage scenes, profiles of audiences, traveling (Whitehead has made known his attraction to shooting film on trains), and sometimes numbing sequences of cryptic and seemingly aimless conversation. The end result is a contextual spectatorship that encloses the group within a cultural frame, something that is not achievable just by filming a concert. Not surprisingly, in retrospect, without the ability to control the images taken by the third-party cameras, the Stones do not always appear in the best of light in these films, either musically or conversationally; this is why showings of the Whitehead and Frank films are either carefully controlled (Frank is required by law to be present at each screening of his film) or, like *Charlie Is My Darling*, protected from the public by the high walls erected by the Stones' copyright owners.

Following Frank's road documentary of the 1972 U.S. tour—of which, according to both Keith Richards and tour logistician, Alan Dunn, many of the most alarming scenes were staged—the Stones took increasing control of their concert footage as a way to rectify, reify, and even deify their historical position within popular music.<sup>7</sup> Beginning in 1989 with the *Steel Wheels*/

*Urban Jungle* tour, a venture that sparked a major resurgence of the band, the Stones seized upon the possibilities offered by new technologies in video and editing, and the growing retail videocassette/DVD market. They employed concert film toward carefully constructing their historical image, a method of representation that was more immediate and visually affirmative than through recordings. With this tour, they became the first band to be shot in IMAX, making the concert film a behemoth theater spectacle (for the time) that, helped by the studio-quality audio of the film, overwhelmed even the live concert. Five years later, during the retro *Voodoo Lounge* tour of 1994–1995, the Stones issued two films, appearing first as Renaissance courtiers (*Voodoo Lounge*, US, 1994) and then road-wearied troubadours (*Stripped*, 1995, much of it filmed in grainy black-and-white), carving themselves into a kind of “Mt. Rockmore” by beginning their live set with Buddy Holly’s “Not Fade Away,” a song they had covered thirty years earlier. In 1997, the ambitious “Bridges to Babylon” featured a lavish, monumental stage, truly evoking one of the “wonders” of the world—the music, inevitably, taking second place.

The following years saw more filmed concerts as the Stones and their promoter relied on quick product release to literally saturate and satisfy the public with Stones video content between tours and as *ex post facto* revenue streams. In the most recent movie by Scorsese, filmed in concert at the Beacon Theatre in New York, the Stones are shot from a multitude of angles by legendary camerapersons. The intimacy the film captures is through the close perspectives plotted cleverly (and with clear admiration) by Scorsese, allowing the viewer to roam onstage with the Stones. Scorsese succeeds in “returning” the group to its elemental, essential shape of the sixties: as “just” a raw club band playing the blues, rather than as a rock Medici, the historical image advanced by the 1989, 1994, and 1997 tours.<sup>8</sup> At the musical level, for instance, Scorsese’s clip of the Stones performing Muddy Waters’ “Champagne and Reefer,” featuring Buddy Guy sitting in on guitar, is a mess: Guy enters four beats too early in the second verse, the band fumbles to get back on track, Jagger himself drops a line in the third verse, and the end is a classic “train wreck,” with everybody finishing at different times with no clear cadence. Only Scorsese would keep a clip like this, since it is evocative of the fundamental culture of the band, capturing the Stones improvising as if they walked into a Saturday afternoon blues jam at the local pub.

\* \* \*

Thus, it is the “third-party” spectatorship through film and photography, rather than through the music itself, that has become the most emphatic voice in defining The Rolling Stones’ cultural position. This is different from the process through which the Stones achieved widespread *popularity* or how we judge their intrinsic aesthetic value, which are “second-party,” or listener concerns. And while the arc of the Stones’ film history stretches across many chronological stages of representation (summarized above), the lasting, official image of the Stones remains the earliest one, with succeeding stylistic representations of the band being cleverly designed variations on a basic

master narrative. This can be defined as an exilic, protean quality derived from the migratory aspects of the blues; a revolutionary stance that is neither political nor constituent; a sharp intuition about the uncharted sexual and gender boundaries of the day; a deep-seated subversion powered by their identification with the raw, black music of American blues and country; and their ability to exploit the conflicts of British youth caught between their colonial tradition and the new revolutionary lure of American popular and youth culture.

### ***Filming the Counterculture***

In 1965, Peter Whitehead was asked by The Rolling Stones' manager, Andrew Loog Oldham, to film the group's two-city tour to Dublin and Belfast on September 3–4. Oldham had heard of the movie *Wholly Communion*, which Whitehead had filmed at a Beat poetry recital in the Royal Albert Hall on June 11, 1965, attended by seven thousand people. Called the International Poetry Incarnation, but best described as a "happening," this "epochal" event assembled many of the most important Beat poets, including Allen Ginsberg, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and Gregory Corso.<sup>9</sup> It provided a point of convergence for the many streams of the emerging underground scene in London, and anticipated by two years the more elaborate art and music happening known as the "14-hour Technicolour Dream" held at the Alexandra Palace and partially documented by Whitehead in his 1967 film *Tonite Let's All Make Love in London*.<sup>10</sup> This event featured performances by the newly formed Pink Floyd, whose visionary first guitarist, Syd Barrett, knew Whitehead from the Slade School of Art and was, according to Whitehead, influenced by him.

Approaching his projects from a morally and socially conscious perspective, Whitehead was deeply involved in Bertrand Russell's Peace Foundation and, like many European pacifists, had found the American presence in Southeast Asia morally repugnant. The Beat poets had demonstrated to Whitehead that a new consciousness was emerging in America and that these poets and their followers were deeply informed critics of their own country. Whitehead was attracted by the "unease about what was going on," and was convinced that this communal event was "the beginning of something serious."<sup>11</sup> As he would do later in *The Fall* (1969), with its shots of Robert F. Kennedy's fated 1968 presidential campaign and dark critique of America in unrest, Whitehead drew on his experience as a newsreel documentarian for Italian television through which he learned the craft of being anonymous with the camera; as a result, his film at the Royal Albert Hall was shot essentially as a member of the audience. Committed philosophically to the antiwar cause, and convinced of an encroaching American "imperialism," politically *and* culturally, Whitehead drew on the immediacy of live filming to voice his own protest, resulting in a film that was "native" to the setting. Thus, through the employment of documentary-style techniques

that cloaked his physical presence, Whitehead explored the social and political circumstances of the period essentially as a participant, successfully extracting deeper cultural meaning from events that were superficially branded in the press as the passing fads of “Swinging London.”<sup>12</sup>

## Charlie Is My Darling

*Charlie Is My Darling* emerges from this background. Whitehead had no a priori point of reference for the Stones; he was not familiar with any of their music, nor had he formed a critical opinion about the band or its reputation. So while the film is ostensibly a documentary of The Rolling Stones, it is also, perhaps mainly, a personal vision of culture in transformation, as in *Wholly Communion*: the experience of protest voiced through the Stones. Using only a single camera along with a Bolex for still shots, Whitehead casts Ireland in a parochial light, capturing on film austerely dressed, working-class Irish youths, bonneted young girls, and horse-drawn delivery carts in the streets, and contrasts these images with shots of the bedlam involving these same youths that breaks out at the second Dublin show, when a riot forces the Stones to leave the stage. As Godard would suggest through the Stones three years later in *One Plus One*, there is the premonition of an emerging anarchy among youth and an escalation of class tensions. In one extraordinary and relevant scene from *Tonite Let's All Make Love in London* that is set to the melancholy single “Lady Jane,” slow-motion images of airborne female fans are suggestive of a dangerous societal instability, as Whitehead remembers:

The song is really about class-consciousness, it's really about tension. It's really about a working-class guy in love with an upper-class girl, so that funny tension in the song is highlighted by the tension in the images which is of these sweet young girls flying through the air colliding, in mid-air, with Mick Jagger. I remember talking to him about this. I said, “What do they do when they get there? Do they kiss you or do they hit you?” And he said, “Well they don't really know. They look at you with complete surprise.” There are some shots in *Charlie Is My Darling*, there's no doubt about it, those boys who get up on that stage, they want to kiss Mick Jagger and Brian Jones, but when they get there they feel so damned silly, they don't know what to do, so they hit them.<sup>13</sup>

In another scene from *Charlie*, a male youth overcome by the concert weeps at the side of the stage in what Whitehead recalls as a “hot and stinking” hall resembling a “pagan ritual throbbing with rhythm,” the boy’s preconceptions about everything, it seems, being systematically dismantled.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the grotesqueness of the Stones’ mannerisms and the presence of a lead singer unrestrained by an instrument, running—often awkwardly—loose on the stage, titillates this audience, which Whitehead has cast in class terms as provincial.

Although Whitehead was “knocked out by the [sheer power] of the music,” calling it an “Orphic mystery . . . a bacchanal,” the actual performance footage does not constitute the most memorable parts of the film (in fact, the

audio and screams were dubbed in later from recordings). The performance footage includes clips of only two songs, “The Last Time,” and “It’s Alright,” along with some backstage jamming on “Maybe It’s because I’m a Londoner,” and an amusing parody of Elvis by Mick and Keith.<sup>15</sup> The most compelling scenes are instead the considerable attention paid to the

<u>THE ROLLING STONES TRIP TO IRELAND September 1965</u>	
<u>Reel 1</u>	
1.	Airport (London) from arrival to boarding plane.
2.	Dublin Adelphi.
3.	Crowd interviews and Stones arrival at theatre.
4.	Stones' Dressing Room.
5.	Dressing Room and First Half of Act.
6.	1st House Dublin on Stage.
7.	Interior Dressing Room. Interval.
8.	Dressing Room. Stones' Exit from Theatre.
9.	Hotel Room (Night).
10.	Hotel Room. Mick, Keith, Charlie, Andrew.
11.	Last Part of Dublin Episode.
12.	Journey (Train) Dublin-Belfast Conversations. Pt.I.
13.	Journey (Train) Pt.II. (Egyptian Art - Charlie).
14.	Journey (Train) Pt.III. Andrew, Mick, Keith, Charlie.
15.	Journey train. Peter to Andrew, Mick and Keith.
16.	Belfast up to arrival theatre.
17.	Belfast. Exit Hotel. Arrive Theatre - Crowds outside.
18.	Theatre First Performance.
19.	Outside Theatre (Interview Priest). Press Conference.
20.	Second House Belfast. Stones' Exit.
21.	Hotel Belfast. Mick, Andrew & Keith. Piano and voice.
22.	Hotel Belfast. Interview Bill.
23.	Bill, Brian, Charlie Interviews. Belfast.
24.	Charlie and Brian. Belfast.

Figure 1. Peter Whitehead: Film structure and reel index for *Charlie Is My Darling*, 1965

witnesses, context, and geography of the shows. Whitehead's original film structure showing the succession of scenes clearly avoids the standard crescendo of building to the concert events that is typical of most rock documentaries (see figure 1).

Blurring the distinction between the "center" and the "periphery" of his subject by training his camera on just about everything—entrances and exits of the band, policemen, bystanders, street life, curious onlookers, rioters, impromptu backstage music—Whitehead prioritizes the mundane, improvised, sometimes vapid offstage culture, as opposed to the frenzy of the more scripted live show. In fact, Whitehead remembers the long, inanimate shots of the dressing room as being "one of the best things I've filmed in my life," where he was able to capture, through long sequences in one take, the truncated, internal vocabulary used by the group members in contrast to the verbal, public assault of the Stones' songs in live performance.<sup>16</sup> "What I liked most about this film," Whitehead told the magazine *Film and Filming* in 1974, "was the fact that when the Stones were talking they were really quite inarticulate. . . . There was a kind of groping. There was an extraordinary inability to describe what they were doing. In fact, Brian Jones was the only one who was really articulate."<sup>17</sup> Chris Welch wrote in the *Melody Maker* that in the movie, "Charlie [Watts] leaves behind a trail of incomplete sentences behind a cigarette smoke screen, and Brian, talking about a film he hopes to make, is suddenly left speechless when a voice asks if he knows the meaning of 'surrealism.'"<sup>18</sup>

### ***Desperately Seeking Charlie: Whitehead and Andrew Loog Oldham***

Following the making of the film, Whitehead's relationship with Oldham began a slow deterioration as a result of the conflict between culture and commerce, which I document shortly, and from Oldham's aggressive actions to gain exclusive control of the film. (Whitehead, for his part, briefly retained the rights as an important bargaining chip for any further collaboration.) In 1966, both *Wholly Communion* and *Charlie Is My Darling* were considered for the Gold Medal at the Mannheim Documentary Film Festival, where *Charlie* received its first public screening; Oldham saw this nomination as a potential publicity bonanza for the Stones, possibly opening the door to other film projects he had in mind, like a Rolling Stones version of The Beatles' *Help*. He therefore agreed to subsidize Whitehead's attendance at the festival, confident that Whitehead would return with the first prize. Instead, the judges picked *Wholly Communion*, with some journalists reacting negatively to *Charlie*, asserting that Whitehead had degraded the Stones in the film by making them seem like inarticulate fools.

Although only few of Oldham's letters to Whitehead were available to consult, it is easy to surmise that his initial reactions to the *Charlie* edits were also negative and led to serious concerns about the film, particularly

involving the improvisatory nature of the process. “The film looks out of this world, never mind out of our heads,” writes an enthusiastic Whitehead to Oldham on November 3, 1965, borrowing a phrase from the title of a recent Stones album, and that in view of its length, Whitehead is “lopping as much out as possible.” By December, however, the mood had changed. Whitehead’s letters from that month suggest that Oldham’s experience with sound recording, in which the realization of a two-minute song is often the synthetic result of splicing together many pieces from multiple takes, made it difficult for him to understand the organic process Whitehead used in making and editing this film. The immediacy of the direct film genre is unique, Whitehead wrote in a long and emotional letter to Oldham on December 21, 1965: “its purpose is NOT to grow on you—to become subliminal—it’s something that really is immediate. . . . The whole principle of editing is to make a thing flow as if you were there looking at it, or to surprise you with a surprise cut.” The remainder of the letter is both a defense of the edits in *Charlie* and a treatise of sorts about editing theory, all in the service of defending the process on ideological and philosophical grounds. The press release from Whitehead’s company, Lorrimer Films, further elaborates on this fundamental tenet of the movie—in which the actual music played by the Stones in Ireland is clearly a subtext—and stakes out Whitehead’s own position as a filmmaker in the cinema vérité genre:

CHARLIE IS MY DARLING is an honest film in the sense that nothing was rehearsed or premeditated and the interviews were spontaneous, always filmed on the spur of the moment . . .

The strength of the film *relies not so much on the success of the tour itself* [italics mine] (for as always this was fantastic) but on the challenge it makes of each individual to reveal their “real” selves—behind the “mask” they must assume for their life in the public eye. It is only necessary to add that it is by no means the whole story, or the last one, about the Rolling Stones or the situation of Pop in England today, but it at least remains a document to testify to the talent, effort and unrelenting patience that is necessary to stay real “behind the scenes.”<sup>19</sup>

Within the next few days, Whitehead and Oldham had a contentious, polarizing meeting while discussing the film, its representation of the Stones, and its eventual distribution, resulting in hardened positions that would prevent the film from ever being publicly released. On Boxing Day 1965, Whitehead wrote an impassioned seven-page letter to Oldham (see figure 2), who had expressed grave reservations about the noncommercial aspect of the film, and was pursuing a legal solution to effectively block the film and assume control of its destiny. A frustrated Whitehead once again confronts the dissonance between the creative and commercial world, and goes to lengths in explaining to Oldham why he cannot compromise his working methods: “There’s no reason we can’t work together,” he writes

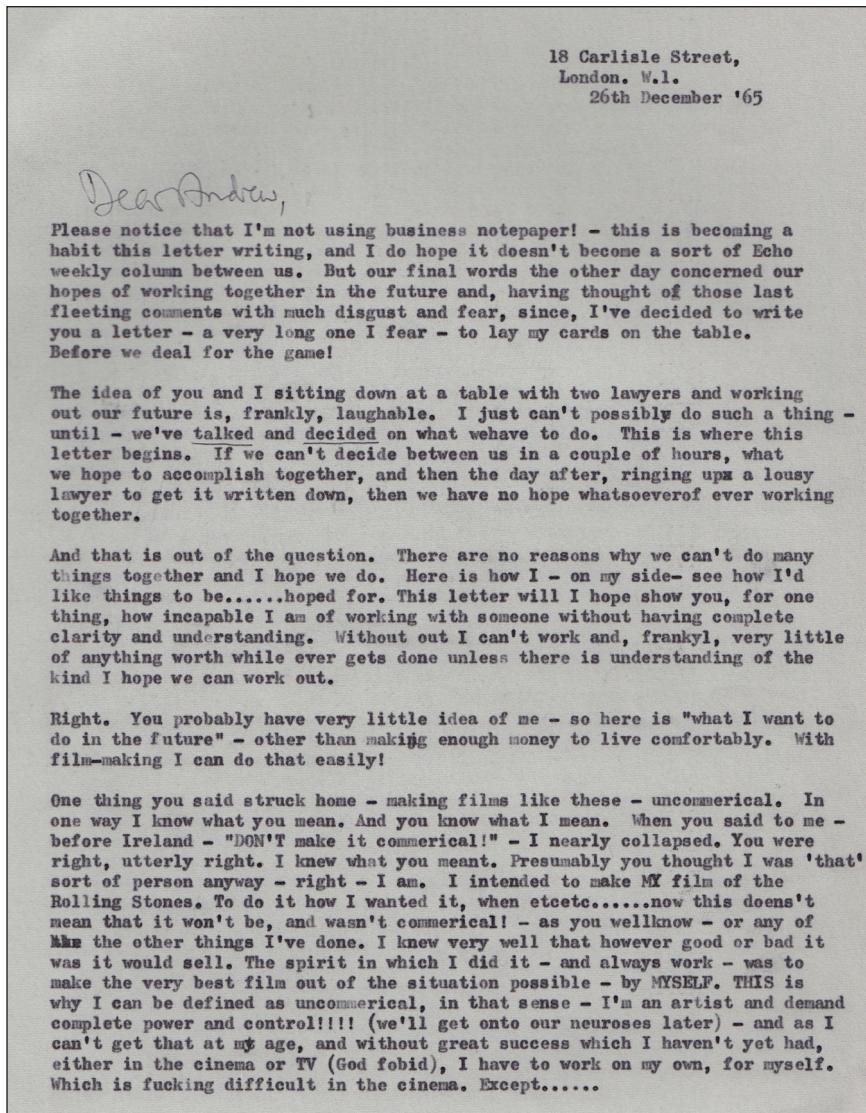


Figure 2. Excerpt of letter from Peter Whitehead to Andrew Loog Oldham, December 26, 1965

somewhat deflatedly to Oldham, "as long as we prepare ourselves for the following conflict," followed by this curious tercet:

You will try to drag me towards immediate, actual things.

I'll try to drag you away towards more long term projects, features etc., that take time and concentration and slow working on.

The idealism of proposed projects and ideas begins to fade, and in February, 1966, a disillusioned Whitehead concludes a letter to Oldham by wondering “What next? I’m getting bored irritable and frustrated—been too high for too long lately. What ARE we going to do next? I have lots of ideas and would like to discuss them. What has happened to all that enthusiasm for filming?”

Nevertheless, in 1966, Whitehead remained on call for other Stones projects; he shot the audacious (and widely controversial) jacket cover of the single “Have You Seen Your Mother Baby, Standing in the Shadow?” featuring the Stones in full drag. Like all of Whitehead’s interpretations of the counterculture, he shot the cover as a statement of protest and destabilization—a complex, inverted assertion of masculinity through stripping the female of her Twiggy allure; one could even say that the Stones in military drag represent women dressed as men. It is a menacing composite portrait of the female subjects, all stripped of their beauty, that is profiled in several songs of the period: the disinherited widow in “Play with Fire” (1965); the pill-addicted housewife in “Mother’s Little Helper” (1966); and the neurotic, high-maintenance débutante in “19th-Nervous Breakdown” (1966).

One of the most daring of Whitehead’s projects involving the Stones was his video of the single “We Love You” in 1967. The song was written as a response to the famous drug busts of Jagger, Richards, and art dealer Robert Fraser at the Redlands home of Richards in February 1967. The event and its aftermath has long been one of the most famous and well-documented episodes in the history of the Stones, and it is often cited as one of the clearest examples of the British establishment’s well-known vendetta against the group and its desire to bring them to trial.<sup>20</sup> Acquitted after a brief time in jail and through the advocacy of a powerful op-ed piece by the editor of the *Times of London*, William Rees-Mogg, Jagger and Richards wrote “We Love You,” a song that drew on the experimental and psychedelic studio techniques used in their 1967 album *Their Satanic Majesties Request*, including actual sounds taken from a prison sound effects tape. The accompanying music video, shot in a church hall in Essex, was made the day before Jagger and Richards’s appeal as a way to arouse sympathy in case it failed.<sup>21</sup> To frame the song historically, Whitehead drew a parallel between this episode and the gross indecency trial of Oscar Wilde, filming a video in which Jagger played Wilde, Marianne Faithfull played Wilde’s lover, the Marquis of Queensbury, and Richards was dressed as the judge. Despite the backup vocals provided by John Lennon and Paul McCartney, the song received many negative reviews, and the video, an oblique but powerful indictment of the government, was banned by the *Top of the Pops*.

As the Oldham machine, now powered with the added octane of new co-manager Allan Klein, found ways to restrict *Charlie* from public viewing, they also attempted to seize the masters from Whitehead, who was still owed £400 and would not turn over the product. (At one point, Whitehead remembers, Oldham and a thug pushed their way into Whitehead’s flat and

demanded the film be turned over, or “we’re going to beat the fuck out of you!”) What seems clear is that Whitehead—with some apprehension—and Oldham had made a verbal agreement about the ownership and licensing of *Charlie* early in the history of the project. Indeed, only a few months after the Irish tour, Whitehead writes to Oldham that he has “LOTS of ideas. I’ve been thinking very seriously about the way to, or not to, contract my soul away to your good intentions and good fortunes—and look forward to the bidding.”<sup>22</sup> But whatever understanding this handshake constituted quickly eroded as the two parties disagreed fundamentally about the aesthetic merits and economic potential—culture and commerce, in short—of the finished product, and Oldham, ostensibly with the Stones’ future in mind, sought to bury the film. Without a contract, the negotiations about copyright and determination of ownership continued into the 1970s, when Whitehead discussed a number of potential biographical and fictional projects with Mick Jagger, proposing him as both film subject and business partner; he also continued trying to interest Oldham in new projects.

### ***Whitehead and Mick Jagger: Assembling the Stones’ History***

In November 1971, Jagger wrote to the BBC from the French Riviera during the recording of *Exile on Main Street*, confirming that he and Whitehead were collaborating on making a definitive film history of The Rolling Stones (see figure 3). This project went unfulfilled, but the correspondence from these years reveals an important story of Whitehead proposing various profit-sharing models to Jagger for the sale of his Stones footage, his pitching of several film ideas, and his determined attempt to be allowed to extend his artistic vision of the Stones as symbols of the seismic countercultural landscape.

Marking an important period in the history of The Rolling Stones, Jagger’s letter coincides with the concluding, on November 23, 1971, of the *Exile* recording sessions at Villa Nellcôte in Villefranches-sur-Mer, and a trip by Jagger and Richards to Los Angeles a week later to begin mixing and making overdubs on the new album. It is also an aggressive period of consolidation and branding on the business side of the Stones’ organization. On April 6 of that year, the group had signed a new contract with Kinney National (which owned the Atlantic, Elektra, and Warner-Reprise labels), and they also created their own “Rolling Stones Records” label (which introduced the now-ubiquitous lapping tongue logo) for distribution purposes. Given the seriousness of the group’s tax problems that had necessitated their “exile” to France in the first place, these events underlie the group’s effort to establish a new business model, seize control of their media history, and manage the marketing and licensing of it at a time when the Stones’ brand was at its most popular.

Not surprisingly, in 1973, with plans stalled for the making of a full-scale life story of The Rolling Stones, Mick Jagger began negotiating with

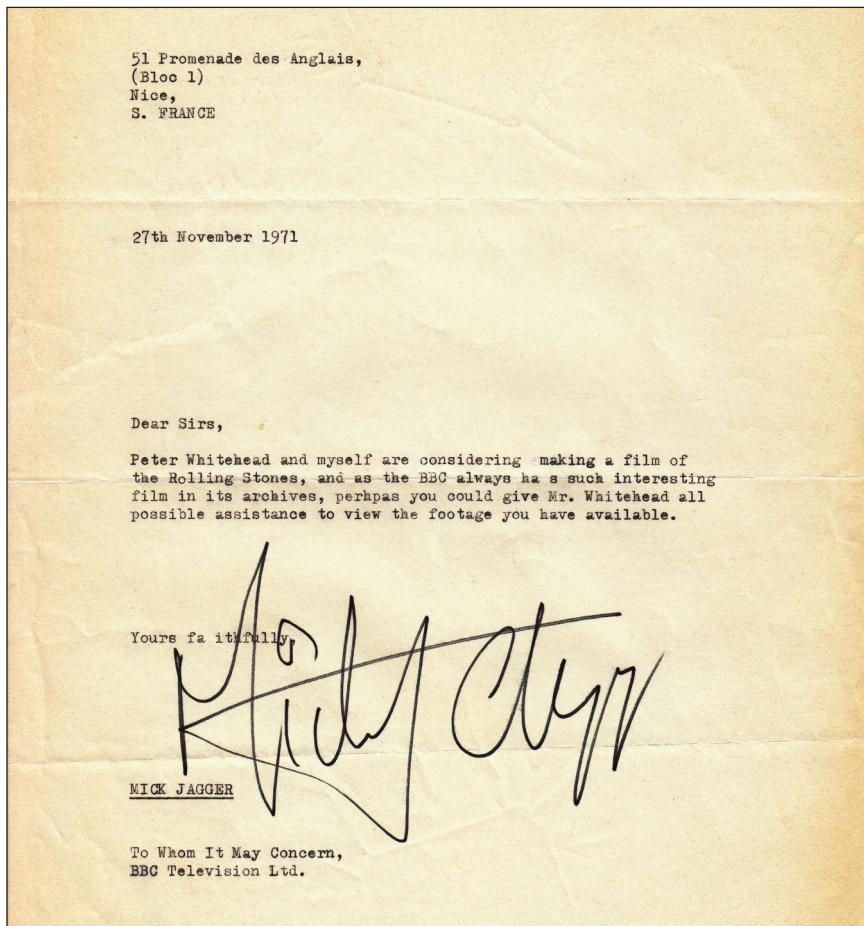


Figure 3. Letter from Mick Jagger to BBC Television, November 27, 1971

Whitehead for the purchase of all the existing footage Whitehead had shot of the Stones since 1965, including *Charlie Is My Darling*. Jagger paid Whitehead to index the extant corpus of this material, and on July 18, 1973, Whitehead sent Jagger a film inventory in anticipation of a meeting the following week (see figure 4).

By December, neither a clear proposal for the use of the material nor a purchase commitment by Jagger had been finalized. Whitehead phoned Jagger, and after what appears to have been a productive, idea-filled conversation, followed up with a new letter, now outlining a series of “very commercial” film projects—one being a ninety-minute film “scrapbook” memoir of Jagger, the other returning to the original idea of a two-hour “History of the Rolling Stones.”<sup>23</sup> The painful memories involving Oldham and *Charlie* are still fresh; Whitehead impresses upon Jagger that if they don’t make the



NARCISS PUBLISHING LTD. 18 CARLISLE STREET, LONDON W.I. 01 437 4417

Mick Jagger,  
48 Cheyne Walk,  
London. S.W.3.

18.7.73

Dear Mick,

Here is the list of the film we talked about today, and comprises all the film I ever shot on the Stones.

1. Charlie is my Darling. Completed film on 16mm b/white approx 45 minutes long. Film and TV Rights, 16mm and 35mm ditribution and Video rights. Also Rights to use footage from the material in proposed general film on the Stones.

22 All the cuts material from Charlie is my Darling. \* Cutting copy, mag sound and negatives.

3. b/w and colour film shot of Stones at Newcastle. two  
4. b/w film shot of Stones at Albert Hall/edited into ~~xxxxx~~ short promotional films to music of Have you your Mother Baby etc.

5. b/w and colour film shot of Stones in America, for promotion film of song; dressing up for still image; Mick in Greenwich village. Edited into short film.

6. Film in colour of Stones at Olympic studios/cut to short films Ruby Tuesday and Lets Spend the Night Together.

7. "Oscar Wilde" film - with Marianne Faithful - promotional short cut to song WE LOVE YOU. Mick and Keith in 'Trial Scene'.

8. Colour Original film (no cutting copy) of Charlie at home, with wife, drums, horns guns etc.

This is to confirm that all this film is in the country and can be seen there. All your film of Rock and Roll Circus is in London and can be seen, given notice, any evening at Document Films in Wardour St.

If in the future, when you come to put it all together, if I can be of any help, I'll be only too pleased to do so.

My number in the country is 053 - 677 - 440. Look forward to hearing from you; and I'll let you know about Mons as soon as I hear from Niki.

See you next week.

Yours,

MANAGING DIRECTOR : PETER L. WHITEHEAD

Figure 4. Letter from Peter Whitehead to Mick Jagger, July 18, 1973

Stones film, “someone else will—and badly—e.g. [Sandy] Leiberson or Klein/Oldham in America, out of our hands and control. Just using all the bad bits of film.”<sup>24</sup> In addition, Whitehead perhaps saw the opportunity to enter Jagger’s immediate circle, which had expanded during this period to include such artists turned celebrities as Andy Warhol and Rudolf Nureyev. He offers to make promotional videos, teach Jagger about film production, proposes an exclusive collaboration—“working closely together, alone, without any other people involved AT ALL”—and (if this weren’t enough!) also volunteers to archive Jagger’s entire film collection.<sup>25</sup> Negotiating now exclusively with Jagger rather than through the layers of his double-breasted management, and evidently close to Jagger’s wife, Bianca (his name comes up frequently in their divorce papers), Whitehead envisions with Jagger commercially successful, economically viable, and above all, artistically respectable projects, contingent upon Whitehead assuming complete directorial and artistic control.

Once again, the following months produce no concretization of these ideas. It is difficult to speculate here about Jagger’s intentions, but it is easy to see proof of his legendary business acumen. If Jagger was uninterested in the specific film projects and collaborations suggested to him by Whitehead, he clearly remained focused on acquiring the rights to the valuable inventory—today, a gold mine—of his Stones footage. Accordingly, in March 1974, Jagger’s solicitors wrote to Whitehead, “wishing to acquire from you and/or Lorrimer Films Limited the film ‘Charlie is My Darling’ and all other film footage relating to the Rolling Stones either as a group or as individuals” for the sum of \$20,000.<sup>26</sup>

The offer was accepted by Whitehead two weeks later,<sup>27</sup> but no money changed hands for months, leading Whitehead to plead for this matter to be settled, even in the form of a deposit, while continuing to suggest film projects to Jagger and even to Oldham. These included an idea for a half-hour television series called *The Union Jacks* based on the idea of a fab pop group and clearly derived from the popular Monkees’ series (which is itself based on The Beatles’ antics in *Help!*);<sup>28</sup> a feature film, called *Nightrip*, using electronic music and with Jagger acting as partial investor (1973); and a feature-documentary film based on the Stones that problematizes the image of the pop icon through the idolatry of fan worship, the insatiable desires of fans, and the ruthless commercial objectives of dictatorial managers. Its plot summary, which “will both celebrate *and* condemn pop music and Mass Media and their power,” chronicles

the rise to power of a pop group, cleverly exploited by a young and megalomaniac manager, who uses them, and their huge financial success, to pursue his ideals of absolute power. Using their image and rebellious nature to attract the country’s youth, he forms a secret army of under 25’s channeling their dissatisfaction against current morality/religion/politics/big business, etc., into a coherent religion of revolution, organising an elite destined to be the new

rulers—leaders who live for the Immediate, sensual and material satisfaction, and whose selfishness is the logical result of, and revolt against, the apathetic complacency and hypocrisy of their elders.<sup>29</sup>

Finally, Whitehead wrote a vaguely biographical treatment of Jagger and Marianne Faithfull, entitled *Orpheus Inc.*, casting Jagger as a driven music executive in an American mass-media company and Marianne, like Euridice, an Arcadian flower child; the plot is a metaphor for the increasing industrialization, technological intrusion, and executive manipulation of pop culture—its ability to both “create” and demolish its icons. As in the Ancient Greek myth, Marianne, injected with a controlling drug, descends into Hades with Mick, as Orpheus, in pursuit. London soon deteriorates into mass chaos as a result of the effects of the drug and the puerility of the manufactured music, and Mick is lynched and thrown into the Thames, his decapitated face reproduced commercially on a record sleeve. (Orpheus, just to remember, was torn apart by intoxicated Thracian women who sent his decapitated head floating off to the Island of Lesbos.) In many ways, these themes are already anticipated by Whitehead’s *Charlie Is My Darling*, which is, in retrospect, a period piece that is highly prescient about not only the culture of The Rolling Stones, but about the complex, dependent relationships between fans, media, and their idols.

\* \* \*

In his work with the Stones, spanning from 1965 (the year of “Satisfaction”) to 1973, Peter Whitehead’s films helped create the foundational and enduring image of the band. But beyond this, the much longer story of Whitehead’s interest in more ambitious projects involving The Rolling Stones testifies to his interest in the cultural, social, and political implications of the group’s work, and the tension between the Stones and a recalcitrant, traditional Britain. In addition, the valuable cache of documents from Whitehead’s personal archives reveals a fascinating collision between Whitehead’s cultural interest in the group and the image that was being carefully constructed by the Stones’ management.

As a chronicler of the counterculture, Peter Whitehead’s work captures the innate revolutionary sense of a destabilized modern culture in the 1960s, using, as his subjects, rock musicians at the nascent stage of their careers. In particular, his long and closely documented relationship with The Rolling Stones reveals the stark contradictions of this counterculture—artistry mediated by economics, idealism confronting the realities of commerce, and above all, the class tensions simmering beneath the façade of British pop culture of the 1960s.

*Victor Coelho is professor of music at Boston University. A musicologist and performer of international distinction, he works primarily in the areas of both Renaissance music and popular music and media, and has appeared on HBO, the CBC, WGBH,*

and MTV, as well as in newspapers, radio, and in documentary films as a specialist on the music of The Rolling Stones and the blues. As a performer on lute and guitar, he has recorded albums of seventeenth-century music for Toccata Classics and Stradivarius, and tours regularly as part of the band of Chicago blues singer Lou Pride.

Coelho's books include *Music and Science in the Age of Galileo* (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer, 1992), *The Manuscript Sources of Seventeenth-Century Italian Lute Music* (New York: Garland, 1995), *Performance on Lute, Guitar, and Vihuela* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), and *The Cambridge Companion to the Guitar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). His current projects include a history of Renaissance instrumental music (with Keith Polk), and *The Cambridge Companion to the Rolling Stones*.

## Notes

I am indebted to the co-editor of this issue of *Framework*, Paul Cronin, and especially to Peter Whitehead for making a great deal of previously unpublished documentary information dealing with The Rolling Stones available to me, including correspondence, sketches of treatments, and interviews, and for permitting its use in this essay.

1. See, for example, John Covach, *What's That Sound? An Introduction to Rock and Its History* (New York: Norton, 2006); and Larry Starr and Christopher Waterman, *American Popular Music: From Minstrelsy to MTV* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). Michael Campbell's *Popular Music in America: And the Beat Goes On* (Boston: Schirmer Cengage, 2006) only discusses 1965's "Satisfaction."
2. Bob Dylan, *Chronicles: Volume One* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004), 115.
3. Mark Paytress, *The Rolling Stones: Off the Record* (London: Omnibus Press, 2003), 200.
4. The young George Lucas was one of the cameramen who shot the Altamont sequence in the film.
5. Puicouyoul's *Vers l'Olympe [Toward Olympus]* is a quilt of videos shot by fans that essentially takes a deep core sample of fan devotion to the Stones. The film premiered at the Centre Pompidou in Paris in March 2008.
6. Add to this list Nigel Finch's superb 1989 documentary *25 x 5: The Continuing Adventures of the Rolling Stones* (producer: Lorne Michaels), made for videocassette with the participation of the band, and chronicling the group's history from its origins to the *Steel Wheels* tour of 1989, often using rare archival footage.
7. On the fabrication of scenes in Frank's movie, see *25 x 5*; for a sordid but accurate firsthand account of the 1972 tour, see Robert Greenfield, *S.T.P.: A Journey through America with the Rolling Stones* (New York: Da Capo, 1974).
8. Scorsese's work with rock musicians began as one of the editors of the original *Woodstock* movie (1970) and continued with landmark projects involving The Band (*The Last Waltz*, 1978) and Dylan (*No Direction Home*, 2005), both drawing, as with *Shine a Light*, a burned-out but celebratory portrait of the subjects.
9. The event and Whitehead's movie receives an insightful review by J. Hoberman in *The Village Voice*, February 6, 2007, on the occasion of a retrospective of Whitehead's films.
10. The film's title is based on a line in Ginsberg's "Who Be Kind To" (*Collected Poems, 1947-1997* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006):

I want the orgy of our flesh, orgy  
 of all eyes happy, orgy of the soul  
 kissing and blessing its mortal-grown  
 body,  
 orgy of tenderness beneath the neck, orgy of  
 kindness to thigh and vagina  
 Desire given with meat hand  
 and cock, desire taken with  
 mouth and ass, desire returned  
 to the last sigh!  
 Tonite let's all make love in London  
 as if it were 2001 the years  
 of thrilling god—

In an interview, Whitehead suggested that during the period that he and Barrett lived in the same house, Barrett became influenced by the music of Wagner, Bartók, and Janácek, which Whitehead was constantly playing. When Whitehead heard Pink Floyd live at the UFO Club, he theorized that the extended length of the group's song "Interstellar Overdrive," along with its small motivic detail, was the result of Bartók's influence on Barrett. Although Whitehead had been initially unimpressed with Syd Barrett's playing, after seeing Pink Floyd at the UFO, he felt that the expansive and organic nature of their music was, in fact, ideal for what he wanted to do as a filmmaker.

11. Paul Cronin, "In the Beginning Was the Image: Conversations with Peter Whitehead" [Dialogue Transcript], Part One, 2–3.
12. Ibid., 6.
13. Ibid., 5.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., 4.
16. Ibid., 3.
17. *Film and Filming*, February 1974, cited in Bill Wyman (with Richard Havers), *Rolling with the Stones* (London: DK Publishing, 2002), 201.
18. *Melody Maker*, January 22, 1966, cited in Wyman, *Rolling with the Stones*, 217.
19. Press release for *Charlie Is My Darling* from Lorrimer Films Limited, 1966.
20. A well-researched account of the episode, the *dramatis personae*, and the aftermath, can be found in Philip Norman, *The Stones* (London: Pan Books, 1984), 224–231; an excellent online account is available at <http://redlandsbust.blogspot.com/2006/04/redlands-bust-when-british.html> (accessed August 9, 2011).
21. Bill Wyman with Ray Coleman, *Stone Alone: The Story of a Rock 'n' Roll Band* (New York: Viking), 452–453.
22. Letter from Peter Whitehead to Andrew Loog Oldham, December 5, 1965.
23. Letter from Peter Whitehead to Mick Jagger, December 16, 1973.
24. Ibid. Sandy Leiberson's first produced film was *Performance* (1970), starring Mick Jagger.
25. Letter from Whitehead to Jagger.
26. Letter from Theodore Goddard & Co. to Peter Whitehead, March 14, 1974.
27. Letter from Peter Whitehead to Theodore Goddard & Co., March 28, 1974.
28. Peter Whitehead, "Proposal for Feature Film (for the Rolling Stones)," n.d., Nohzone archive.
29. Unpublished plot summary, Nohzone archive.