Mick Jagger as Mother

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Jagger is most certainly a mother figure and he’s a mother hen to the whole thing.
—David Bowie, Rolling Stone, 1974

David Bowie said it. The idea is grotesque—intentionally shocking—yet oddly compelling. Mick Jagger and the Rolling Stones have always been positioned as the antithesis of parents, if not of mothers more specifically: “Would you let your daughter marry a Rolling Stone?” the tabloids asked, before the band even had a hit record. What can we learn by following Bowie’s lead of thinking of Mick Jagger as mother? In this article I intend to do just that through an assemblage of material—songs, performances, film, video, and images, as well as historical and theoretical texts—that supports Bowie’s observation. As an enduring cultural icon of rock ‘n’ roll, Mick Jagger embodies a musical and gestural crossroads of race, class, gender, and sexuality—a site of subversive ambiguities as well as rampant imitation and commodification.

Mick Jagger and dissident sexuality is a topic as old as the Rolling Stones themselves (now over fifty years as a working rock band). The standard celebratory narrative locates Jagger’s performance of sexuality as part and parcel of his and the Rolling Stones’ performance of race, as historian Andre Millard neatly asserts: “What Mick Jagger and Keith Richards took from the bluesman image was the sense of unrestrained and powerful sexuality, the former in his performance and the latter in his guitar playing. The mythical bluesman was both blessed and cursed by his sexual appeal to women.” Yet Jagger’s gender bending and homosexual intrigues have been noted by rock journalists since 1969 (a significant year discussed below). Most dismiss Jagger’s and the Stones’ gender
bending as simply a gimmick to shock the older generation—“icing on the cake of outrage” as Jon Savage puts it.\textsuperscript{3} Music scholar Shelia Whiteley takes Jagger’s transgressions of gender and sexuality more seriously if also ambivalently: on one hand, Jagger “laid the foundations for self-invention and sexual plasticity”; on the other hand, “Jagger remains an idealized representation of himself: ‘Jumping Jack Flash,’ the eternally youthful androgyne, focus of every possible sexual appetite.”\textsuperscript{4} Ultimately for Whiteley, Jagger’s narcissism (not to mention the sexist tenor of songs like “Under My Thumb”) gets in the way of a fully emancipatory reading.

My revisiting of Jagger is not prompted by any glaring wrongheadedness of these various observations. Rather, I am intrigued by the resonance that Bowie’s figuration of Mick Jagger as mother has with recent scholarship on race and psychoanalysis (and of course mothers and psychoanalysis), homonormativity and homonationalism, and the ramification of neoliberalism in cultural spheres. Much of this scholarship tackles the ongoing structural fear of and desire for racial and sexualized others and the economic, political, ideological, and psychic drivers that produce strategic aggregations and disaggregations (to use Jasbir Puar’s terminology) of race and sexuality in embodiment and cultural expression. The above quotations from Savage and Whiteley suggest just such strategic aggregations and disaggregations in Jagger’s performances but also, importantly, in the common narratives of Jagger reception in which blackness seems to morph into queerness as an organic development of self-promotion and marketing (“icing on the cake”) or as a consequence of a liberal cultural evolution toward sexual plasticity. But how easily can we separate Jagger’s repertory of black sexual moves from his repertory of queer sexual moves? Or, for that matter, when and how do they combine? And what in Jagger’s aggregations also works toward disaggregation—the occlusion of blackness by queerness?

This article traces Jagger’s participation in a complex dynamic of race, class, gender, and sexuality within Great Britain and America over the course of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. These decades represent an extended era of upheaval in race relations within both countries, coupled with a sexual revolution that took the Freudian concept of sexual repression for granted, not as a social good for the preservation of a civil society but, rather, as a personal and social ill to be overcome. The ideology of liberation pertained to both public and private spheres, underwriting the utopianism of the New Left as well as the self-concerned individualism that colluded with emerging neoliberal capitalism.\textsuperscript{5} Pop cultural forms—especially rock ‘n’ roll—created a theatrics of, and market for, sexual desires newly liberated from perceived familial and social repression. In the 1950s and early 1960s, such sociosexual (white) liberation was achieved through an alignment with racial (and sexual) others; from around 1968 onward, such liberation also attached to performances of sexual and gender mobil-
ity. Here Bowie’s mother analytic proves useful: far from being a stable or monolithic entity within the cultural imagination, the mother signifies origins and reproduction, desire and its displacements, refuge and discipline, acceptance and conservatism. In 1966 the Rolling Stones released the single “Have You Seen Your Mother, Baby, Standing in the Shadow?” and, indeed, the mother in her various guises shadows Jagger and his own shifting figurations as a burlesque dame, a mixed-race fetish object, a drag mother, and a belated rock ’n’ roll matriarch. These queerly matrilineal assemblages provide a cultural genealogy for present-day homonormativity, homonationalism, and neoliberal colorblindness.

I. Mating Dances and Pantomime Dames

The insinuating Blackness of the Stones reincarnated what was the most fearsome, hence, attractive, about the Black rhythm and rockabilly pop of the ’fifties.
—Ellen Sander, Vogue, 1970

I think Mick’s a joke, with all that fag dancing, I always did.
—John Lennon, Rolling Stone, 1970

In October 1964 a remarkable event took place at the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium: it was a star-studded concert called the T.A.M.I. Show (T.A.M.I. standing for Teenage Awards Music International), which included a wide array of American and British artists of diverse gender and race, headlined by the Rolling Stones. A film of the concert was released nationwide in December, disseminating an image of rock ’n’ roll as integrationist and inclusive—just before styles split off into racial and gendered categories of white rock, black soul, and feminized romantic pop. In the footage, Chuck Berry trades verses of his song “Maybellene” with Gerry and the Pacemakers; Leslie Gore sings a remarkable set of antiromance songs: “You Don’t Own Me,” “It’s My Party,” “Judy’s Turn to Cry.” James Brown precedes the Rolling Stones, skating across the floor with impossibly agile footwork, eliciting shrieks from the audience as he embodies locomotive polyrhythms for “Night Train.” After fifteen performers, the Rolling Stones finally take the stage to the din of screaming girls that never subsides. Opening with a Chuck Berry song “Around and Around,” Jagger imitates Brown’s quick movements of the feet and ankles, but without Brown’s upper body control so that Jagger’s whole torso quivers and jerks (these James Brown moves became part of his regular dancing vocabulary). Of the Rolling Stones’ five-song set, four were written and/or recorded earlier by African-American artists. In this initial stage of their career, the Rolling Stones were mostly a cover band, in song and in dance, learning their trade of “insinuating Blackness.”
Fast forward to the summer of 2011: the airwaves are inundated with Mick Jagger’s name in this chorus performed by singer Adam Levine and the band Maroon 5:

I don’t need to try to control you
Look into my eyes and I’ll own you
With them moves like Jagger
I’ve got the moves like Jagger
I’ve got the mooooooves like Jagger

Jagger’s “moves” seem to need no explanation; they signify irresistible sex appeal, a kind of snake-charming technique rendering women powerless. But what does it mean to have the moves like Jagger? The video for this song offers a curious mélange of fleeting shots that intercut vintage films of Jagger performances from the late 1960s and early 1970s with a bare-chested and tattooed Adam Levine—his sinewy, hairless torso reminiscent of Jagger’s own body on display—and a parade of anonymous everyday people tepidly busting Jaggeresque moves. These amateur Jagger impersonators together present a curious profile of gender and race: most are sexy women—black, white, and Asian—who strut, pose, and wag their finger; and the rest are white men (black men are notably absent) in Jagger drag (or just drag), whose comparatively awkward and feminized mimicry shores up Levine’s own masculine sex appeal, also buttressed by the hyperfeminine Christina Aguilera who takes the lead vocal at the end. The multiracial and multigendered cosmos of rock ‘n’ roll in the T.A.M.I. Show of 1964 has, by 2011, condensed into the queerly reproductive body and moves of Mick Jagger, whose progeny of imitators carry on his own legacy of imitation. But the Maroon 5 video conveys other more disturbing messages: only women can “move like Jagger” without risk of being queer, and white men who try are queer. Black men, to whom Jagger owes both his music and his moves, have been entirely erased from this cross section of the population: they have no place in it.

John Lennon thought dancing itself was queer, and especially Mick Jagger’s dancing. But when did Jagger’s dancing become queer? Or was his dancing always queer, because it was black, because it was imitation black, or an imitation of an imitation? The Beatles did not dance. According to John Lennon, this was because they did not want to be an imitation: “In the early days in England all the groups were like Elvis and a backing group. And the Beatles deliberately didn’t move like Elvis, that was our policy, because we found it stupid and bullshit. And then Mick Jagger came out and resurrected bullshit movement, you know, wiggling your arse and that.” To “move like Elvis” is “bullshit movement”—fake, inauthentic. But Elvis himself was an original fake—the first white performer to bring black rhythm-and-blues vocals and hip shaking to a national
television audience on the *Milton Berle Show* in 1956. Early Elvis was saturated with racial ambiguity, as Greil Marcus notes:

At the start, Elvis sounded black to those who heard him; when they called him the Hillbilly Cat, they meant the white Negro. Or as Elvis put it years later: “. . . made a record and when the record came out a lot of people liked it and you could hear folks around town saying ‘Is he, is he?’ And I’m going ‘Am I, am I?’”

The epistemological questions that surrounded early Elvis spoke to the color of his culture, not his skin; his racially mixed identity stems from the sound of his voice and the style of his music. But the same questions—is he? am I?—more readily conjure another structure of cultural identity: sexuality. The ambiguous racial alignment of early Elvis did not generate suspicion of his sexual orientation but, rather, of his sexual intention. As dance historian Lisa Jo Sagolla asks: “So was Presley being intentionally ‘sexual’ when he accented phrase endings with his pelvis, or was he just imitating a black movement tradition as he performed songs that were deeply rooted in black musical traditions?” In the mid-1950s, the answer was that sexual movement and black movement were one and the same: one critic decried Elvis’s performance on the *Milton Berle Show* as “abominable gyrations . . . plainly suggestive animation short of an aborigine’s mating dance.”

The above quote lays bare the entwined associations of primitivism and hypersexuality with black bodies (condensed in the word *aborigine*), which had a long history in Europe and the United States prior to the 1950s. Moreover, in early twentieth-century scientific discourse, abnormal interracial mixtures of body type (the “mulatto”) and of object choice (miscegenation) implied parallel abnormalities of gender inversion and homosexuality. For much of middle-class white America in the 1950s, the era of federally mandated desegregation, the explicit sexual liberty encoded in the mixed-race culture of early rock ’n’ roll fed directly into reinvigorated fears of miscegenation. As if to stoke the flame of these fears, Norman Mailer’s 1957 essay “The White Negro: Superficial Reflections on the Hipster” celebrated the primal sexuality of black musicians: “Jazz is orgasm.” For the white male hipster, the imitation of black male bodies—their fashion, music, and dance—served as a vehicle for rebellious non-conformism and allied sexual potency. Although Mailer specified jazz, Nelson George suggests that Mailer’s ideas may have been inspired by Elvis Presley and the “infatuation with black style and culture” evident in white working-class adaptations of rhythm and blues.

In this way Elvis was indeed performing a miscegenous—and queer—“mating dance,” conjoining white and black male bodies through his mimicry. For John Lennon, then, Mick Jagger’s resurrected Elvis “arse
“wiggling” inexorably leads to fag dancing. Imitation fake black becomes imitation queer (see fig. 1). Spastic, awkward, slightly knock-kneed, with wrists and elbows bent inward, and a rhythmic bopping (not always in musical time) that keeps his body afloat (the epitome of the phrase “light in the loafers”)—these are Jagger’s moves, here broadcast to the American mainstream in 1967 via the _Ed Sullivan Show_. This is possibly the earliest example of Jagger’s self-conscious “fag dancing,” or at least a self-conscious switch from emulating James Brown to emulating Tina Turner, who opened for the Stones in 1966. I have no doubt that Jagger was camping it up for the Sullivan cameras, given away by pronounced eye rolling and an ever so subtle lisp, perhaps as a response to the modification of the lyrics required for the family show: “let’s spend the night together” was changed to “let’s spend some time together.” Like the music hall dandies and pantomime dames that were staples of British comedy on stage and screen, Jagger’s dance is a burlesque of gender and sexuality. Though he moves like Tina (sort of), he wears Elvis drag (the gold lamé jacket Elvis sported in 1957); and while he mouths the words that could refer to a daytime walk in the park, his body performs the spasms of the elided nighttime activities.

Jagger’s drag effects reach an apogee in 1969 when jumpsuits with scooped-neck tops and flowing scarves or capes, along with heavy eye shadow, added sartorial gender bending to the fey preening. In another _Ed Sullivan Show_ appearance, Jagger sings “Love in Vain,” an old slow blues song by Robert Johnson first recorded in 1937. He does not dance for this song but stands quite still as the camera zooms in for a close-up to the exclusion of the rest of the band (see fig. 2). His lips purse and expand, animating his characteristic exaggerated pronunciation, full of elongated and warped vowels in imitation of the southern dialect of black bluesmen:
“lu-uh-vs / in vuh-ay-neh.” The camera’s intense focus on Jagger’s face as he sings this rootsy lullaby metonymically performs the astonished and spellbound gaze of the home audience, trying to make sense of the conflicting cues of intimacy and otherness, and the misfit between the old blues sound and the new queer image. Jagger stares at us, and we stare back—like an infant studying the mother’s face to learn a vocabulary of expressions and their meaning.

II. Of Mimicry and M/Other

Mick is the greatest R&B singer this side of the Atlantic and I don’t mean maybe.
—Keith Richards, letter to his Aunt Patty, 1962

Well, one always wants to have an affair with one’s mother. I mean, it’s a turn-on.
—Mick Jagger, Rolling Stone, 1968

David Bowie referred to Jagger twice as a “mother figure,” and it is clear the two occasions were well crafted (as all things with Bowie are) and conjoined with a discussion about the global market for rock. Both occurred
during interviews with *Rolling Stone*: the first appeared in November 1972 during his first American Tour.

DAVID: Very few countries need rock-and-roll. Very few. It’s America and England that need it. . . . Rock provides a family life that is missing in America and England. It provides a sense of community.

ANGELA: I think Mick Jagger would be astounded and amazed if he realized to how many people he is not a sex symbol.

DAVID: But a mother image!

At the time of this interview Bowie had just released the career-defining futuristic hard rock ‘n’ cabaret album *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* in June, and the Rolling Stones had released their nearly career-ruining double album of boozy retro country blues and soul songs *Exile on Main Street* one month earlier. The two men were not yet friends, though both, heavily influenced by Andy Warhol and his entourage, had turned the androgyny of psychedelic fashion into ever more provocative gender-bending performances. Two years later, in February 1974, Bowie in conversation with the novelist William S. Burroughs expanded on the idea of Jagger’s mother image as if the earlier conversation had taken place only the day before:

BOWIE: . . . Certain countries don’t need rock & roll because they were so drawn together as a family unit. China has its mother-father figure—I’ve never made my mind up which—it fluctuates between the two. For the West, Jagger is most certainly a mother figure and he’s a mother hen to the whole thing. He’s not a cockadoodledo [sic]; he’s much more like a brothel-keeper or a madame [sic].

BURROUGHS: Oh, very much so.

BOWIE: He’s incredibly sexy and very virile. I also find him incredibly motherly and maternal clutched into his bosom of ethnic blues. He’s a White boy from Dagenham trying his damnest to be ethnic. You see, trying to tart the rock business up a bit is getting nearer to what the kids themselves are like.

Bowie’s nod toward Jagger as a “mother hen to the whole thing” underscores their kinship in image—Jagger as drag mother. For present-day readers, Bowie’s language calls to mind the legendary house mothers of underground LGBT ball culture, brought to mainstream attention in 1990 with the documentary *Paris Is Burning*. Yet, besides the hilarity of arguing for rock’s family values, with Jagger as mother no less, this quote reveals the easy slippage among terms of race, sexuality, and
commerce—here set against the evocation of China’s communist regime under Mao Tse-Tung, which Bowie rather astutely observes is both maternal in its social welfare and paternal in its totalitarian control. Jagger, too, is both caring and controlling—the madam-entrepreneur of sexuality, and the white mammy for white kids, like Bowie himself, fleeing their suburban homes for the urban motherland of black blues.

Jagger’s “bosom of ethnic blues” warrants further scrutiny for it holds in tension the nationalistic tropes of “Mother England” and “Mother Africa”—the former a civilizing parental force of the colonizer, and the latter a reimagining of the colonial feminized “Dark Continent” as maternal plenitude. Bowie seems to evade race with the ambiguous word *ethnic*, yet this word points directly to the discourse of race prevalent in British politics throughout the 1960s and 1970s, strongly influenced by the populist anti-immigration speeches of Enoch Powell, MP (1950–74). In the wake of postwar decolonization and the fading imperial majesty of Great Britain, Powell reimagined an English nation that was in essence self-contained, self-sustaining, and foundationally white and Christian—a “phantasmatic construction,” as Anna Marie Smith describes it, dependent on the repression of the knowledge of Britain’s economic dependence on colonies, slave trade, and a sizable population of Afro-Caribbean and Asian laborers in England itself. Powell argued that race was a cultural issue, not a biological one; thus, a black immigrant could become a UK citizen but never culturally British. This effectively defined the category “black” as an ethnicity, with distinct (alien) language, music, dance, and sensibilities that were incompatible at best, and ruinous at worst, to traditional white British culture. By 1974, the year of Bowie’s “bosom of ethnic blues” comment, the rhetoric of cultural relativism and protectionism had become normalized.

Yet *blues* unambiguously points to African-Americans, whose history of enslavement, underwritten by notions of natural racial inferiority, enshrines the blues as the privileged musical signifier of authentic emotional expression and cultural resistance—an authenticity that white musicians who perform blues and blues-derived styles could approach only via association and approximation. For aspiring British rhythm-and-blues artists of the early 1960s, America was the true motherland, and bluesmen the true mothers.

The mother, according to Sigmund Freud, is the first object of the libido, which eventually must be replaced by a more suitable object, with the memory of that primal desire kept from consciousness—repressed and relocated to the unconscious as a latent force. The traumatic redirection of incestuous desire occurs through the Oedipus complex, instigated in male children by a fear of castration stemming from a perception of the father as a more powerful rival. In female children desire for the mother gives way to penis envy, which reconfigures the father as the object of desire.
and the mother as a rival. During the time of the Oedipus complex, little boys and girls discover somehow (and to their horror, of course) that the omnipotent “phallic mother” in fact lacks a penis: she has been castrated. This realization facilitates the child’s repudiation of her.

The psychoanalytic duality of the phallic mother and the castrated mother provided the basis for polarized and ambivalent representations of mothers in 1950s and 1960s Hollywood cinema, which was heavily influenced by a postwar popularization of Freud and psychotherapy. In the film Rebel without a Cause (1955), the cause of the rebelliousness enacted by troubled teenager Jim Stark (played by James Dean) is actually made quite clear: it is his overbearing, castrating mother, and castrated father, with whom he cannot identify. (Freud postulated that such an imbalance in the family dynamic led to homosexuality in the male child.) Nowhere is mother trouble more evident than in Alfred Hitchcock’s psychological thrillers, such as Vertigo (1958), Psycho (1960), The Birds (1963), and Mar - nie (1964), with plotlines that revolve around phallic mothers and/or castrated mother substitutes, and fraught—or downright gruesome—manifestations of desire for the mother by the adult protagonist. Similarly, the 1967 film The Graduate, speaking directly to the era’s college-age youth, featured the ultimate phallic mother-turned-whore in the character of Mrs. Robinson, the parent-age family friend who leads the graduate Benjamin into a tawdry sexual affair and who becomes her daughter’s rival for his attention.

In popular music, one can make the distinction (or not) between “mama” as a sexualized term of address or naming within the blues tradition (“Long Tall Mama,” “Rollin’ Mama Blues,” Willie Mae “Big Mama” Thornton) and familial “mothers” who are for the most part portrayed as angelic and sacrificing (“This Little Mother of Mine”) or as wise councilors (“Mama Said (There’d Be Days Like This)” and the lyric “My mama told me, you’d better shop around” from “Shop Around”). Mothers in Rolling Stones’ songs, by contrast, betray their pop-Freudian milieu. They are dark, sexualized, and transgressive figures: wealthy and slumming for “kicks” in “Play with Fire,” popping pills in “Mother’s Little Helper,” evading duties of family and nation in “Nineteenth Nervous Breakdown” (“your mother who neglected you owes a million dollars tax”), and lurking—in rhyme and psyche—behind sexual encounters in “Have You Seen Your Mother, Baby, Standing in the Shadow?” (“have you seen your lover, baby, standing in the shadow?”). These songs, all released in 1965 or 1966, evacuate the sentimentality or respect associated with songs about mothers of prior generations, replacing fantasies of total affection and nurturing with ones of narcissism, neurosis, and sexuality. (The Beatles would restore sentimentality to mothers with “Your Mother Should Know” in 1967 and “Julia” in 1968.) Singing about mothers is not the same thing as...
being a mother or a mother figure, yet the single of “Have You Seen Your Mother, Baby, Standing in the Shadow?” makes just this leap in the cheeky cover photo of the Rolling Stones dressed in 1940s drag—images of their own mothers’ generation. And in a 1968 interview, when asked about the sexual innuendo of “Play with Fire” (“there is a suggestion that the guy in the song is having an affair not only with the daughter but with the mother”), Jagger made the pronouncement: “Well, one always wants to have an affair with one’s mother. I mean, it’s a turn-on.”

In the Freudian logic of Mick Jagger, fantasy lovers always blur into fantasy mothers. Though perhaps a tossed-off comment on a 1965 song from the vantage point of 1968, Jagger nevertheless articulates a structure of desire within which he has crafted his own objectification; in other words, he is both the subject turned on by the incestuous fantasy and, as an established rock idol, the replacement for the mother in this economy of desire—the fetish. “The fetish,” Freud writes, “is a substitute for the mother’s phal- lus which the little boy once believed in and does not wish to forego.”

Importantly, the fetish signals a disavowal of sexual difference and thus a narcissistic homosexual fantasy—an avowal of sameness—though the choice and treatment of the substitute phallus can also reveal a recognition and symbolic enactment of castration. The ambivalence of disavowal and recognition of difference at the root of sexual fetishes colludes with sexualized discourses of race in ways that forged Jagger’s status as a particularly potent fetish object. Homi Bhabha sees as fetishistic the twinning of fear and desire in racial stereotypes (e.g., the lustful African) and the play of identification and disidentification in the specter of mimicry: “A colonial encounter between the white presence and its black semblance.”

Freud provides illustration in his comparison of fantasies and other “derivatives” of instinctual impulses to “individuals of mixed race who taken all round resemble white men but who betray their coloured descent by some striking feature or other.” Within such colonial discourse, skin color functions as “the key signifier of cultural and racial difference.”

But for what do these racial fetishes substitute? Is there any remnant of the (missing) maternal penis? For Frantz Fanon, writing in 1952, the racial drama enacted within colonialism and its legacy supersedes the family drama in identity formation: the black other in the public domain replaces the first other lodged in the unconscious as a thoroughly libidinous image: “The civilized white man retains an irrational nostalgia for the extraordinary times of sexual licentiousness, orgies, unpunished rapes, and unrepressed incest. . . . Projecting his desires onto the black man, the white man behaves as if the black man actually had them. . . . The black man is fixated at the genital level, or rather he has been fix-
The black man’s passivity in Fanon’s account registers what many have observed is a defining and confining paradox within Euro-American culture: the black man signifies both extreme sexual potency and feminization or castration. In other words, they have the phallus (as does the father), and they also lack the phallus (as does the mother).

More recently, Margo Natalie Crawford has examined how the particular hue of skin color—the degree of blackness or whiteness—can stand in a fetishistic relationship to phallic presence and absence. She writes:

In psychoanalytic theories of the sexual fetish, “having” the phallus is the position of power, whereas “being” the phallus, the reflection of the phallus, is the site of disempowerment. The one-drop rule makes “being” white the privileged term and refuses to make “having” whiteness a reflection of the phallus. Antiblack racism is constantly being both internalized and subverted by African Americans, so that an imagined phallus of blackness sometimes emerges in addition to a certain dilution anxiety, the sense that dark-skinned blackness is the visual signifier of “roots” and cultural authenticity and that light skinned blackness is a visual signifier of assimilation and cultural hybridity.

As we have seen with Elvis (or, indeed, not seen), this question of coloration—of “being” white but “having” blackness—is foundational to the discourse of early rock ’n’ roll, and it was foundational to the Rolling Stones nearly a decade later. In 1963 one reviewer of the Rolling Stones in concert (when they were called the Rollin’ Stones) observed: “They are genuine R&B fanatics themselves, and they sing and play in a way that one would expect more from a coloured U.S. R&B team than a bunch of wild, exciting white boys who have the fans screaming—and listening—to them.” Screaming and listening to white boys who sound black: the description denotes precisely the intersection of infantile desire and a racial fetish transduced into sound. Mick Jagger as mother, the “bosom” of ethnic blues, transforms Bhabha’s formulation of “colonial encounter between the white presence and its black semblance” into psychoanalytic encounters between black phallic presence and its white semblance, a semblance that camouflages absence and disavows difference: Mick Jagger as m/other.

III. The Rooster Will Be Televised

To teens in the mid 1950s, Rock’n’Roll carried, encoded within its arcane language, the promise of a new world . . . where they could have sex and consume freely. —Jon Savage, England’s Dreaming

Jagger’s status as a (mixed race) fetish object (standing for the phallic m/other) depends on his relationship to race, gender, and sexuality as
produced by music within a market economy. In its earlier usages, which informed Freud’s, the word fetish referred to primitive religious practices that endow objects with magical powers. Karl Marx applied this notion of magically enchanted objects to commodities: “A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men’s labor appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labor. . . . This I call the Fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labor so soon as they are produced as commodities.” Whereas for Freud fetishism is one pathological outcome of sexual development, for Marx fetishism is the normal condition of capitalism: all products of labor, which are turned into commodities within capitalistic modes of production, are fetishized. They become magical objects that harness and organize social relations. According to Keith Richards, in the formative years leading to the Rolling Stones the vinyl records of black blues and rhythm-and-blues musicians were indeed (commodity) fetish objects that not only magically brought him and Mick together (“that fateful day, on the train”) but organized their decidedly homosocial bond: “It was very unlikely that any chick would get in the way at that point, of getting a chance to hear the new B.B. King or Muddy Waters.”

Rhythm and blues entered Great Britain in a wave of general postwar thrall with America and its popular culture, which extended even to the Latin mambo craze and celebrations of Americana figures such as Davy Crockett in songs, movies, and television shows. White British citizens, for the most part, disavowed any relationship to the legacy of slavery of the United States and saw few parallels with racial tensions on their own soil until the late 1960s. In the mid-1950s the concern over the musical colonization of British youth by black rhythm and blues and white rockabilly had its racist aspects, embedded in the epithet “jungle music,” but antirock criticism more explicitly decried rock ‘n’ roll for the Americanization and concomitant delinquency that had gripped riot-prone working-class youths. “Viewed as a social phenomenon,” one British journalist wrote in 1956, “the current craze for Rock and Roll material is one of the most terrifying things ever to have happened to popular music. . . . We blithely follow the lead of the American industry. When father turns, we all turn.” America, a former British colony, here figured as “father” points to the sense of humiliating loss in the sharp decline of Great Britain’s imperial power. So blackness—specifically American blackness, as signified by rhythm and blues, and materialized into vinyl disks—functions both as a commodity fetish and a sexual fetish, displacing women (as Richards relates) and overcompensating for the castration of the nation-state.

The London blues scene that gave rise to the Rolling Stones was more purist, musically speaking, than the rockabilly and girl-group craze.
that shaped the Beatles’ northern Merseybeat sound. In the Stones’ earli-est club days of 1962–63 they identified expressly as a rhythm-and-blues group (as opposed to rock ’n’ roll). Their first top-ten UK and US single was a cover of Buddy Holly’s “Not Fade Away” (February 1964) black-ened up with a prominent Bo Diddley beat. Later that year the Stones released “Little Red Rooster” as a UK single—a decision to resist the expected move toward pop with a swerve to “a raw Willie Dixon blues,” as Keith Richards describes it. Although not sold as a single in the US market, the Stones promoted the song in their televised appearances during their third US tour—first in a live performance on the Ed Sullivan Show on 2 May 1965 and then a couple weeks later on the ABC rock ’n’ roll show Shindig!, for which the song was given a peculiar dramatic stag-ing: an overgrowth of leafy branches, a dilapidate wall, and an imposing Victorian doorframe lit by flashes of mock lightning opens onto Jagger’s silhouette (see fig. 3).

The camera advances slowly toward Jagger; he seems to flip a
switchblade in his hand. Over the course of the song, enhanced by the chiaroscuro effect of the lighting, the camera dramatizes Jagger’s seductive menace by zooming into a tight close-up of Jagger’s face as he sneers, bares his teeth, stares into the camera, and licks his lips like the Big Bad Wolf. “I am the little red rooster,” Jagger proclaims. But the Dixon original, first recorded by blues singer Howlin’ Wolf (aka Chester Arthur Burnett) in 1961, says this: “I have a little red rooster.” The shift from metaphor to metonym—from a cock that one has to a cock that one is—secures Jagger as the fetishized phallic object. The B-horror movie atmospherics served as a tie-in to ABC’s new ghoulish sitcom the Addams Family (airing from September 1964 to September 1966). This sitcom, along with its direct competitor the Munsters (CBS), reflected and parodied contemporary middle-class concerns over the integration of schools and neighborhoods: as Laura Morowitz explains, these freakish families “served as a convenient stand in for blacks and ethnic minorities...outsiders attempting to ‘invade’ the idyllic suburbs.” The Shindig! staging of “Little Red Rooster” participates in the parody of those concerns but also strategically reinforces them, for Jagger’s apparent switchblade combines the gothic monstrous with the urban murderous. The moment Jagger unveils that his switchblade is actually a harmonica, he also reveals the true object of fear and fascination: the black man, metonymically represented in the blues.

With “Little Red Rooster,” Jagger found the perfect vehicle to satisfy the Rolling Stones’ fantastical projection of blues purity and to capitalize on the new publicity machine that cast them as degenerates and Jagger as immoral (an intentional direct contrast to the Beatles’ image). ‘That Jagger alone should appear in the Shindig! staging of this song illustrates the force of Jagger’s metonymic and branding function—as a menacing cock, as a predatory wolf, as the principal product of an industrialized sexuality, as the blues Disney-fied. Yet on this same show, and reportedly at the insistence of the Stones, Shindig! included Howlin’ Wolf among its featured artists that night. His appearance (also his first on US television) seemed designed to create a sharp divide between the commodified blues theater of Mick Jagger and the “real thing”—an authentic black bluesman. Howlin’ Wolf, a towering man with a barrel chest, square jaw, and disproportionately big hands, stood in the center of an awestruck white audience; Brian Jones and Mick Jagger appear seated “at his feet.” He sings “How Many More Years,” dramatized only by the simple theater of his bodily responses to the music and lyrics—finger wagging, jumping, hip shaking. The harmonica, a weapon in Jagger’s hands, seems a miniature toy in Howlin’ Wolf’s, and his sandpaper tenor scrapes our ears with emotion, and bears little resemblance to Jagger’s languorous tenor. Howlin’ Wolf’s spot on Shindig! makes a hypermasculine mockery of Jagger’s prior cartoonish and (in hindsight) feminized menace.
Perhaps such a stark contrast was the point: Jagger and Richards knew authentic blues, and they were, quite literally, a pale imitation, as Jagger would sometimes admit. But an important element in the Rolling Stones’ own discourse of authenticity is precisely their knowledge of the difference, coupled with a triumphal narrative of reviving the careers of black bluesmen through their commodified versions and explicit promotion. “In our arrogance at the time,” Richards writes, “we wanted to make a statement. ‘I am the little red rooster / Too lazy to crow for day’ [sic]. See if you can get that to the top of the charts, motherfucker. . . . And the floodgates burst after that, suddenly Muddy and Howlin’ Wolf and Buddy Guy are getting gigs and working.” In being the midwife in the rebirth of black blues, Mick Jagger was indeed both mother hen and rooster or, as Bowie would have it: cock-a-doodle-doo.

In addition to introducing Howlin’ Wolf to a wide US audience, this Shindig! episode was momentous for yet another important televised first. The episode was shot in Los Angeles on 20 May while the Rolling Stones were finishing tracks for “(I Can’t Get No) Satisfaction” in the RCA Studios in Hollywood, and they debuted this song for the show’s final segment and credits, miming to instrumental and vocal tracks that were later rejected. But the lyrics of the song were in place, and the censors cut out of the tape a whole segment of the song containing the two sexual lines (from “I can’t get no girl reaction” to “and I’m trying to make some girl”). The camera, however, has been telling us all we need to know about those excised words with its fetishistic focus on Jagger’s lips and eyes—a visual echo to the earlier and much raunchier “Little Red Rooster” (“If you see my little red rooster baby, I want you to please drive him home”).

Released as a single in June 1965, “Satisfaction” provides both sequel and commentary to “Little Red Rooster.” The song marks a significant stylistic departure that can be measured visually on the Shindig! program: though up-tempo, Jagger does not bust his James Brown moves as he had at the opening of the show with Chuck Berry’s “Down the Road Apiece.” Rather, Jagger stomps his foot and claps his hands to the march-time snare. We are in a sound world of crisp mechanistic beats and noisy minimalistic guitar riffs, of dense lyrics, run-on phrases, and sing-along refrains. In sum, this is not a rhythm-and-blues song: it is a rock song—one that cleverly camouflages its rhythm-and-blues roots.

We all know the opening fuzz-toned guitar riff, legendarily recorded by Keith Richards in a dream state one night: “I wrote ‘Satisfaction’ in my sleep. I had no idea I’d written it.” Most accounts (some by Richards himself) claim the riff was inspired by the horn line from a Martha and the Vandellas song, “Dancing in the Street,” but those with a keen ear have corrected this reference to their song “Nowhere to Run,” which had been released in February 1965. In his autobiography, Life,
ever, Richards mentions neither song as an inspiration but does admit that he imagined the “Satisfaction” riff as a horn line—just as it appears in “Nowhere to Run.” The key feature of both riffs is the melodic and syncopated ascent to the same climactic note, technically called the flat 7 scale degree (notated with the $b$ in fig. 4)—one of the two characteristic blues notes (the other being flat 3 also featured in the melody). As figure 4 shows, the horn riff for “Dancing in the Street” has a completely unrelated melodic and rhythmic profile in which the blues note (also flat 7) is embedded in a quick melodic turn. In theory, blues notes provide alternative versions of a single scale degree (7 and flat 7); in practice they are often featured in melodic pitch bending or slides between the two. Some scholars attempt to trace these blues notes to West African melodies; others, to the synthesis of those melodies with European ones. Flat 7 is a particularly expressive pitch as it lowers the leading tone to the tonic—a rare and always marked occurrence in Western classical music. These lowered and mobile pitches became definitive of jazz and blues and hence are considered distinctly African-American. With the industrial production of riffs starting in the mid-1960s, pitch bending and slides yielded to clean and decisively rhythmic hooks, losing some of the exoticism, though not completely. “Nowhere to Run” hits that flat 7 hard and long, which obviously made a big impression on Richards since he copied the moment in both “Satisfaction” and “Jumpin’ Jack Flash.”

The omission of Martha and the Vandellas in Richards’s latest narrative of “Satisfaction” tellingly contrasts with his explicit debt to bluesmen and other male heroes such as Chuck Berry noted throughout his *Life*. This reflects what film theorist Kaja Silverman has described as a powerful cultural ambivalence attached to the female voice, which, she argues, always refers to the maternal voice and its associations with both plenitude and entrapment. Richards’s mythologized groggy origin of his
most famous riff enacts this ambivalence: “Nowhere to Run,” a song that thematizes the paranoia of entrapment (of love and its inevitable heartache), as well as the threat of exposure and revelation, has been suppressed within Richards’s fantasy, and so, too, the maternal voice—here represented by the horn-line counterpoint to Martha Reeves’s soulful statements. In “Satisfaction” that brassy sound of trumpet and saxophone, then coming into prominence with the southern soul of Wilson Pickett and Otis Redding, becomes the guitar distortion of the Gibson fuzz-box pedal: sounds once emanating from the mouth now consigned to a phallic. Nevertheless, it is the mother’s voice lodged in the unconscious, in her distant horn calls that lead us into the ambivalent and ambiguous fantasy of “Satisfaction”—the song, and the wish fulfillment.

“Satisfaction” does have an ambiguous form: a lengthy melodious chorus that sounds like a verse, followed by a lengthy monotone verse that sounds like a bridge, and a shouted refrain that comes at the end of both sections: “I can’t get no satisfaction!”—a line poached from Chuck Berry’s “30 Days.” And that riff—always that strident riff (the return of the repressed?), erupting at the climax of the chorus and nagging beneath the verses like a neurotic symptom in the counterpoint to Jagger’s chants about frustrated desire from which we cannot run or hide:

When I’m watchin’ my TV  
And a man comes on and tells me  
How white my shirts can be  
But he can’t be a man ’caus he doesn’t smoke  
the same cigarettes as me . . .  
I can’t get no satisfaction  
I can’t get no girl reaction  
and I try . . .

But what is this frustrated desire? Is this song about the inability to get laid? Or is it the inability to find the right product? The answer, of course, is both. Jagger’s lyrics point to the equation of sexual satisfaction with consumer satisfaction, the media-created kinship between desire for a person and the desire for a product that results in the impossibility of fulfillment. Here Freudian fetishism falls in line with commodity fetishism: “Satisfaction” offers a sonic documentation of the libidinous drive for satisfaction displaced from the mother’s breast to Jagger’s cigarette or, rather, to his mouth, for to “be a man” is to become Jagger’s commodified mouth. Shindig! had already isolated Jagger and his mouth as the key commercial image of the Rolling Stones, but in 1971 the Rolling Stones made it official with a new corporate logo (see fig. 5): an insolent mouth and tongue of indeterminate gender and race, with thick exaggerated lips
reminiscent of blackface minstrelsy, and teeth reminiscent of a *vagina dentata*. Do we consume Jagger? Or does he consume us?

The 26 May 1965 episode of *Shindig!* broadcast a watershed moment for the Rolling Stones: in their pre-“Satisfaction” era, Mick Jagger offered a model of liberation for sexually disenfranchised white men enabled through a fantasy of liberated black masculinity; with “Satisfaction” the black, working-class, masculinist Americana of “Little Red Rooster” gives way fully to white-shirted (i.e., white), corporatized, and castrating American consumerism. While “Satisfaction” imagined sexuality as insatiable consumerism, the song also, ironically and self-consciously, sold a new and improved Rolling Stones product as it spoke to the crisis of “selling out,” evincing both desire and horror in the face of consumption. The single’s B side, a song titled “The Under Assistant West Coast Promotion Man,” offers further arch commentary on this split subject of mid-1960s rock ‘n’ roll. Unlike the pop amalgam of “Satisfaction,” this song is straightforward twelve-bar blues: it is authentic music that mocks the inauthenticity and the masculinity of the company man. But this feminized company man is literally the flip side of the sarcastic rebellious rocker—two sides of the same coin and vinyl disk.
IV. Mother and Child Reunion

Summer’s here and the time is right for dancin’ in the street.
—as sung by Martha Reeves, 1964

’Cause summer’s here and the time is right for fighting in the street, boy.
—as sung Mick Jagger, 1968

Although the influence of “Dancing in the Street” on “Satisfaction” is apocryphal, the lyric quoted in the 1968 song “Street Fighting Man” is exact, with only the substitution of “dancing” with “fighting.” “Street Fighting Man” was inspired by an anti–Vietnam War rally in London in March and the student and worker strikes in Paris in May. Its release in the United States coincided with demonstrations in Chicago during the August Democratic Party Convention, which imbued the song with an uncanny timeliness. The fleeting reference to “Dancing in the Street” may simply be an embedded invocation of the band’s rhythm-and-blues origins, from which their albums of 1966 and 1967 had strayed. Or perhaps it referred to the song’s use in civil rights demonstrations starting in 1967; the 1964 lyric hints at this adoption as a rallying cry with its call for the spontaneous enactment of embodied freedom.

“Street Fighting Man” was scheduled for release in May 1968 but then shelved in favor of another single, “Jumpin’ Jack Flash,” and another type of enacted embodied freedom. The song and promotional film announced the new outlaw construction of the Rolling Stones: macho swagger derived from the blues sensibility of “Little Red Rooster” combined with performance elements of gay mimicry—drag, androgyny, homoeroticism, and swish. Richards explains that the riff of “‘Flash’ is basically ‘Satisfaction’ in reverse”—the first of his mass-produced riffs from their classic era (1968–73), here recycled from a song about mass production (see fig. 4). Riff inversion parallels gender inversion in the song’s promotional film directed by Michael Lindsay-Hogg. Recalling the cross-dressing sleeve cover of “Have You Seen Your Mother, Baby, Standing in the Shadow,” the Rolling Stones all appear in some kind of drag—Jagger in Indian war paint, the rest in eyeliner, high-sheen make-up, and big starlet sunglasses (see fig. 6).

The promotional film is a visual burlesque of cultural and sexual outlaws giving voice to the simmering fury of a demonic spawn: “I was born in a cross-fire hurricane . . . I was raised by a toothless bearded hag, I was schooled with a strap right across my back . . . I was drowned, I was washed up and left for dead.” The witchy androgyny of the mother figure, the disciplinary strap, and the murderous abandonment form a macabre backstory to the Hollywood horror blues staged on Shindig! in 1965. The long, slow delivery and barren harmonies of “It’s alllll-riiiight
now” Richards describes as “almost Arabic or very old” and “wicked glee.”67 Jagger, the “ethnic” and “demonic” front man in a band of spaceage drag queens, dances energetically as he sings, hints of Tina Turner still in his pony and mashed potato steps. And here we glimpse what dance scholar Thomas F. DeFrantz argues is a neoliberal logic in the circulation and appropriation of black dances in the 1960s and 1970s: a free market of movement in which black dance loses its connection to blackness and becomes a privatized display of freedom.68 Jagger may bust some Tina Turner moves, but the queer drag in this peculiar promotional video would seem to take us far from a black rhythm-and-blues context.

Yet the songs that the Rolling Stones recorded in 1968 for their Beggars Banquet album introduce the vocabulary of roots rock that came to define them—reinterpreted Mississippi Delta blues, Latin and boogie grooves, country honky-tonk, folk ballads, and riff-driven rock—most of it now written by Jagger and Richards. The move backward (or forward) to Americana roots music, and blues in particular, coincided with the moment of high racial tension in the United States with the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. (April 4) and rising profile of the Black Panther Party, and in Britain with Powell’s incendiary “rivers of blood” speech (April 20), which crystallized the emergent “popular representation of black militancy as a foreign invader from the United States.”69 In the film One Plus One (more commonly known as Sympathy for the Devil) director Jean-Luc Godard capitalized on these racial tensions and the Rolling Stones’ new/old sound by juxtaposing scenes from a June 1968 recording session of the Rolling Stones (slowly putting together “Sympathy for the Devil”) with contrived vignettes of radical propaganda and a “message is the medium” self-consciousness—most notably of armed Black Panthers ritualistically killing white women while black intellectuals read politi-
cal speeches into a tape recorder. In contrast to the high artifice of these vignettes, the footage of the Stones is deceptively objective, showing the tediousness of their labor and thus their authenticity.70

Despite—or because of—this association with radical racial politics, Jagger’s next two film projects explored the intersections of class, gender, and sexuality within a decidedly white British context: Performance (shot in September 1968) and the biopic Ned Kelly (shot in the summer of 1969). The two films present Jagger in diametrically opposite roles: in the first he is a reclusive androgynous rock star (Turner) holed up in a gritty part of London; in the second, an Irish bush ranger in nineteenth-century Australia, on the run from the British authorities.71 Both films were released in 1970 within months of each other, but while Performance has gained cult film status, Ned Kelly has been all but forgotten, in part because in the years following both films Jagger chose the sexual outlaw image from Performance over the ethnic and class outlaw image of Ned Kelly.

Performance, directed by Donald Cammell and Nicolas Roeg, offers a dark portrait of the psychedelia and sexual freedoms of the “swinging London” counterculture represented by Turner’s decadent effeminacy and druggy malaise. But normative straight culture is also corrupt as represented by the other central figure, the violent gangster enforcer Chas, played by James Fox. Both Turner and Chas are performers and artists in their respective worlds of music and violence. This underlying sameness and its ambivalent disavowal and recognition become the central drama that plays out between Turner and Chas in a queer version of the Freudian mother-child dyad. The substitution of Turner for mother is effected in a short out-of-character moment when Chas, on the run from other gangsters after a cruel thrashing, calls his mother just prior to taking refuge in Turner’s home, where Chas will find an alternative family, an alternative mother, and an alternative psychic trauma and resolution.

The psychic trauma for Chas is one of reidentification with the feminine Turner, and its radical resolution occurs in a climactic scene in which the boundaries between their bodies and egos disintegrate. This process begins in a psychedelic swirl: Chas is given an overdose of magic mushrooms; then, as a supposed disguise, he is dressed in what amounts to comically inept Turner drag (a burlesque of a burlesque), all of which induces psychosexual vulnerability (see fig. 7). The process continues, however, with a jarring intrusion of technology as Turner makes his own preparations for the ritual joining by plugging patch chords into a wall of knobs and sockets of a then-novel Moog synthesizer. One of the first films to feature a synthesized sound track, this revelation of the means of production casts Turner as a decidedly bourgeois countercultural figure. Otherworldly synthesized sounds depict Chas’s warped perceptions:
whirring, pulsing, crackling machine noises mix with a snippet of improvisatory blues sung by Merry Clayton (famous for her vocals on “Gimme Shelter”). Amidst the cacophony of music and noise she wails “poor white hound dog.” It is a lyric that cannot help but conjure Elvis Presley (in an earlier scene Turner appears in Elvis drag) and, ever so briefly, the politics of race. Suddenly this rite of passage, this moment of psychedelic sexual liberation, connects across time to the origin story of rock ‘n’ roll: the sexual liberation of white youths afforded by black music and dance.

But this particular exploration of freedom is effected through homosexual rape: as Chas sits stoned and incapacitated, Turner shoves a long fluorescent tube several times into his ear, which instigates a musical dream-vision—a surreal melee of Turner’s and Chas’s worlds of music, homoeroticism, gangsterism, and sadism. At the end of the film, Chas shoots Turner in the head (a parallel to the penetration by the fluorescent tube), completing the spiritual absorption. Machismo and effeminacy have become one in a strangely Oedipal moment of matricide: the ritual murder of the (phallic) mother reverses the trauma of difference and separation with a cathartic avowal of sameness.
This inverted drama of queer kinship is given a mise-en-scène of racial politics: we see glimpses of the mixed-race population in the dilapidated London neighborhood of Notting Hill, the scene of famous race riots in the 1950s, and alongside the otherworldly synthesized sounds, the sound track features the American roots music that forms the Rolling Stones’ aesthetic. Most notable, however, is the inclusion of the recitation “Wake Up, Niggers” by the Last Poets, a US Black Nationalist collective of writers and musicians that had formed only months earlier. Replete with polyrhythmic African drumming and layered vocal chanting, this number serves as the entrance music for Turner in his first meeting with Chas, aligning Turner’s disturbing queerness with aggressive expressions of blackness. No doubt this choice represents an ideal solidarity among outsiders, but it also renders race—or, rather, racial politics—invisible: the sound of black radicals is made to signify a queer liberal subject who is white, British, and bourgeois.

Recalling Crawford’s work on coloration, this facile folding of blackness into queerness amounts to a dilution (or, in a phallic economy, a castration) of black radical politics, what Fanon might describe as a negrophobic response that in an overdetermined way also points to desire. Phobia in psychoanalytic theories, Fanon notes, are “linked to the absence of the mother,” but in his analysis of race relations negrophobia derives from the sexualization of black bodies; thus, “the negrophobic man is a repressed homosexual.”73 Fanon’s scale is not individual, however, but cultural: a systematic phobia that points to a systematic homosexuality, which leads to the violent cycle of “transgression, guilt, denial of guilt, paranoia.”74 Turner’s transgressive yet reclusive world represents the explosive cultural moment of 1968 relocated from the public streets to the private self.

V. Prancing in the Street

It doesn’t matter what you wear, just as long as you are there.
—as sung by Martha Reeves, 1964

Performance marks a pivotal moment in the cultural politics of Mick Jagger as an icon of sexual rebellion and liberation, namely, an overt turn toward effeminacy and draglike costumes, and hints of bisexuality that he consolidated with the satanic stage image of his 1969 shows—an occultism that had both British and blues sources. The queer element to this mélange may have been further inspired by Kenneth Anger’s 1969 film Invocation for My Demon Brother, for which Jagger provided the synthesizer sound track.75 This image, however, garnered puzzlement and mockery by journalists, who offer evidence for the occlusion if not also disaggregation of
blackness within this new persona: “Mick Jagger, boss man of the Rolling Stones, started out posing as a tough punk and evolved into rock’s foremost hermaphrodite—ambiguous enough to appeal to all the newly created sexes, he has recently taken to wearing lipstick and fluffy dresslike frockcoats on stage. The new Mick is Satan, superstud and drag queen rolled into one ball of incredible quirks unbelievable to behold.”76 As this quote illustrates, Jagger’s fey Satan persona was conveyed in both body language and fashion—notably, fashion that had nationalistic bents. The “dresslike frockcoat” designed by Michael Fish, unveiled at the London Hyde Park concert in July 1969 (their first live show in two years), echoed the “poet’s shirt” of Lord Byron—billowy bishop’s sleeves, ruffled cuffs and collar, and a flaring skirted bottom (see fig. 8)—explicitly evoking the famous British dandy of the nineteenth century.77

For the US tour later that year, Jagger shifted his national orientation from a British dandy to a Yankee Doodle dandy: “Mick came bounding from behind a pile of amplifiers. He was dressed nearly all in black—black belled mariachi pants, a long-sleeved tee-shirt (also black), a silk print scarf that hung to his hips, a red-white-and-blue Uncle Sam hat... He literally pranced from one side of the stage to the other... He rolled his eyes like Eddie Cantor. He waved, wagging a limp wrist” (see fig. 9).78 The reviewer’s reference to the famous blackface performer Eddie Can-
tor, and hence to Jagger’s ties to a long national history of minstrelsy in both America and Great Britain, astutely brings to the fore the representational density in Jagger’s image: his facial mimicry of blackface mimicry combines with a red-striped top hat to collapse the white patriarchal personification of America with the “black urban dandy” of minstrel shows, reviled for his class transgression and sexual appetites. Thus Jagger enacts and parodies past and present displays of white ambivalence, what Eric Lott describes (in reference to minstrelsy) as “equal parts ridicule and wonder in regard to blacks and black culture.”

In this 1969 concert tour, perhaps more than any other before it, Jagger performed the American obsession with black bodies and culture necessarily mediated and displaced by an aggressive camp display of (white) nationalism, and black and/or British dandyism and occultism. Thus, the release of Performance and Ned Kelly in 1970 reinforced the seeming bifurcation of Jagger’s performance of gender and sexuality from his performance of race; that is, Jagger’s long-perceived biraciality did not necessarily map onto his perceived bisexuality, constructed as white, affluent, and bohemian.

This Jagger of 1969–70, an assemblage of British bisexual bohemianism and effeminate blues minstrelsy, became the primogenitrix in the genealogy of David Bowie, who likewise donned a Michael Fish dress for the cover of his 1970 release The Man Who Sold the World and starred in his own generation-defining movie of decadence and alienation, The Man Who Fell to Earth (1976), directed by none other than Nicolas Roeg, who directed Performance. US journalists repeatedly cite the Jagger–Alice Cooper–Bowie family tree in their narratives of Bowie’s rise to stardom—Alice Cooper having concocted an androgynous theatrical rock persona a year before Bowie’s Ziggy Stardust. The Los Angeles Times reporter Robert Hilburn, writing in September 1972 about David Bowie’s upcoming first American tour, remarks: “Bisexualness has been part of the image of other rock figures—namely Mick Jagger and Alice Cooper, but the image until now, has always seemed more theatrical than real.”

Six months later in March 1973, Tom Zito, lamenting the decline of rock, writes: “Just as downs diluted some of rock’s musicality, so too came a concomitant decline in sex roles. The ambiguity always latent in Mick Jagger’s stage presence transmuted through the transvestite image of a male Alice [Cooper] into the unabashed homosexuality of David Bowie.” Hilburn’s “until now” and Zito’s “unabashed homosexuality” signal the sense of a new “fag rock” era inaugurated by Bowie’s coming out (“I’m gay . . . and always have been”) in Melody Maker in January 1972. Though widely regarded as a publicity stunt more than a true
Figure 9. Mick Jagger in Uncle Sam hat during a 1969 US tour. Courtesy Cinema5/Photofest.
©Cinema 5
confession, the statement caused a new insistent and explicit questioning about sexuality that attached to androgyne rockers thereafter.

Bowie and Jagger both insisted on a specifically British lineage for this particular sexual dissidence (sidelining the American Alice Cooper) with statements like “England has always had a bisexual scene” (Bowie, 1972) and “it was sophisticated to be camp and effeminate. . . . It was English—guys dressing up in drag is nothing particularly new” (Jagger, 1995). Yet it was clear by 1974 that hyping a queer image also made good business sense, tapping into the emerging new market of the conspicuously consuming American gay audience, as observed by this Chicago Tribune reporter:

“Attribute it to changing sexual consciousnesses, the rise of gay pride, the bisexuality espoused by certain of the members of the women’s liberation movement, the androgynous sexuality of rock’s dubious tastemakers a la David Bowie or Mick Jagger. . . . Whatever the reasons, gay—or at least the semblance of a little good old bisexuality for straights unable to really be anything but straight—has become the latest thing in certain hip circles, and the gay places have become the most au courant of all. . . . These days, you see, gay not only is good, it sells—and business is booming.”

“At least the semblance”—suddenly we are back in the discursive realm of mimicry, where gayness has replaced blackness as the new edge, the new performance/purchase of freedom. Mick Jagger, once a tastemaker for black rhythm and blues and sexual liberation in the countercultural 1960s, became in the postcountercultural 1970s a tastemaker for sexual licentiousness and queer chic.

The insistence on the Britishness of androgyny, camp, and bisexuality, especially from Jagger in 1995, works against his obvious investments in black gay culture in the 1970s, evident in the Rolling Stones’ turn toward dance music and disco under the influence of keyboardist Billy Preston. A token nod to black gay desire became part of Jagger’s act in the tour of 1975–76. Preston, during his own funky song “Outa Space,” would come to the front of the stage for a virtuosic dance solo, then bump and grind with Jagger, holding him around the waist, groin to groin. The visual effect is both homoerotic and heteromiscegenous—a black man in a towering afro (wig) dirty dancing with a diminutive white woman in Italian designer apparel (see fig. 10). Jagger is essentially topped by his black queer sideman—racially, musically, and sexually. Yet in short order Jagger tops Preston, for immediately following Preston’s number the Rolling Stones break into “Brown Sugar,” one of their most popular and most scandalous songs from 1971 about sexual liaisons between women slaves and white masters. From 1972 on, Jagger consistently changed the lyrics of “Brown Sugar” in concert, excising a few racially inflammatory lines
while giving the song a queer spin: “how come you taste so good . . . just like a young girl should” became “how come you taste so good . . . just like a young boy should.” Although the gender shift predates the concerts with Preston, in those concerts “Brown Sugar” points directly to Preston as the embodiment of the song’s routinely queered racial object. More clever “icing on the cake of outrage,” perhaps, but the progression from “Outa Space” to “Brown Sugar” is also astonishingly recursive, from a performed fantasy of racial equality and sexual plasticity to a sung fantasy of colonial domination and omnivorous sexual exploitation. Furthermore, the sequence disconcertingly reenacts the T.A.M.I. Show of 1964 when contemporary black music yielded the stage to nostalgic white imitations.

Jagger does credit Preston for “the four-on-the-floor bass-drum part” that led to their disco hit “Miss You” (May 1978). Yet Preston did not in fact play on that recording, or on any of the songs from the ensuing album Some Girls (with yet another cover design that features the Rolling Stones in drag). Although it was lauded by critics as a return to the Stones’ “archetypal sound” of bluesy guitar-oriented rock, some reviews of the
album added gratuitous, veiled racist and homophobic snipes: “They’ve . . .
more importantly, ditched the vacuousness of Billy Preston”; another
review concurs: “Gone (thank you, Lord) is Billy Preston and his infer-
nal funky clavinet.” 87 The Stones’ apparent ditching of the black queer in
their lineup at the moment they foray into black gay subcultural music fell
in line (whether planned or by chance of timing) with the whitewashing
and straightening of disco in 1978, instigated by the juggernaut that was
the film and sound track *Saturday Night Fever* (November 1977). For the
1978 and 1981 tours, the Stones used only two white side musicians, and
Jagger’s image took on a somewhat butcher cast, as he both toned down
the cosmetics and began playing rhythm guitar for the first time (imitat-
ing John Lennon?). As a capstone to this retrenchment to white rock ‘n’
roll, the encore of their 1981 American tour featured Jagger shirtless, in
football tights, wrapped in a cape fabricated from British and American
flags, singing “Satisfaction.” This campy comic book patriotism recalls
the Uncle Sam outfit of 1969 and chillingly signals the Reagan-Thatcher
neoconservative revolution on the horizon (see fig. 11).

In 1985, at the height of Thatcherism and Reaganomics, Mick Jagger
and David Bowie teamed up for the first time to sing—what else—“Dancing
in the Street,” the Martha and the Vandellas’ song linked to the fantastical
origin story of “Satisfaction” and referenced in “Street Fighting Man.”
Here Jagger and Bowie—rumored one-time lovers—dance exuberantly
and flamingly together in a combo parody-celebration of their gay mys-
érique, and in ironic homage to black girl groups in a girlless urban landscape. They recorded the song and video to raise funds for famine relief in Ethiopia. One could, as many have, view this as a shamefully low budget and rushed video produced for charity and thus hardly worth much investment—capital or creative. It is widely considered one of the worst videos of the era, in part because their dancing is so . . . uncool. Not queer chic but queer farce.

Yet perhaps some politics does lie behind this self-indulgent hamming. Although the song calls out to “everyone around the world” to dance in the street, the urban landscape of streets and buildings in the video is completely abandoned; at one point they dance in a drab paint-peeling hallway with a darkened staircase (a school perhaps, or rundown apartment building?). We can read the background as commentary—a stark vision of urban impoverishment, AIDS devastation, and education cuts as a result of neoliberal deregulation, privatization, and disregard for racial and sexual minorities. Dancing in the street as a condition of freedom apparently applies only to those who can afford it—namely, white British rock stars.

The video and song raised considerable funds for the cause, probably due to Jagger’s and Bowie’s gay following, who by 1985 had become a key consumer market of the MTV generation, governmental policies notwithstanding.

VI. Sympathy for the Mother

And try to get it on like once before,
when people stared in Jagger’s eyes and scored,
like the video films we saw.
—David Bowie, “Drive-In Saturday,” 1973

Between Bowie’s two statements about Mick Jagger as mother, the younger rock icon of the 1970s paid tribute to the elder icon of the 1960s in two songs from the album *Aladdin Sane*.

In “Drive-In Saturday,” a sad-sack doo-wop number, Jagger’s sex appeal is a thing of the past. The sentiment is the exact opposite of Maroon 5’s “Moves Like Jagger”: in “Drive-In Saturday” Jagger’s magical transferential power—the revolutionary sexual fervor of the 1960s—exists only as a belated moment in time captured on video. And to belabor his vision of the apocalyptic death of the Stones era, Bowie also includes a cover of their quasi-romantic pop song “Let’s Spend the Night Together”—but it is an Oedipal makeover in the fast tempo, choppy rhythms, clipped and condensed phrases of protopunk, prefiguring Devo’s mechanistic cover of “Satisfaction” five years later.
In his memoir, Keith Richards bemoans Jagger’s increasingly self-conscious gender antics in the 1970s as purely competitive with Bowie, but Richards also astutely observes that Jagger began to emulate his own commodified image: “It’s almost as if Mick was aspiring to be Mick Jagger, chasing his own phantom.” In 1996 Anton Corbijn produced a portrait of Jagger that, in the penetrating deadpan gaze, seems to reveal another identity to that phantom (see fig. 12). This matronly figure—a desexualized if not also masculinized aging woman of wealth and power—is the opposite side of the coin shared by the effeminate rocker who sings “Little Red Rooster” and “Jumpin’ Jack Flash,” though she may share the sentiment of “(I Can’t Get No) Satisfaction.” In this portrait Madam Jagger shows her years, weariness, and conservatism in a way Mick Jagger never could. Once the maternal bosom of ethnic blues, next the drag mother for glam rockers, and finally a conservative woman of wealth—from the vantage point of the millennium and beyond, Bowie’s figuration of Mick Jagger as mother and rock ’n’ roll as an alternate family structure that America and England “need” seems remarkably prescient of the neoliberal politics that conscripted queers into a “homonormative” model of family, consumerism, and nationalism. “The new homonormativity,” as Lisa Duggan argues, can be traced to the mid-1990s (coinciding with Corbijn’s portrait) and the narrowing of gay and lesbian political objectives to inclusion in marriage and military service “promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption.” Pushing this analysis into the post-9/11 context of the war on terror, Jasbir Puar argues that homonormativity became newly mobilized within militant nationalistic rhetoric (hence her term homonationalism), which disaggregates assimilated and civilized gays and queers from racial and sexual others figured as barbaric by comparison. While Puar’s focus lies on the strategic rhetorical opposition between gays and Muslims (figured as perversely sexualized yet perversely repressed), her observations work equally well in the domestic sphere where the reported misogyny and homophobia of black men (widely represented in rap) has become a rallying cry for feminists and gay activists. We can see this at work in the pointed exclusion of black men in the Maroon 5 video, for it is black men who pose the biggest threat as a kind of “terrorist assemblage” that cannot be assimilated to hetero- or homonormativity, and hence are figures of truly perverse sexuality. (One last detail about the video: during the last chorus of the song, all the dancers, Maroon 5, and Christina Aguilera appear in front of an enormous American flag, unfurled to replace the British flag—perhaps in homage to Jagger’s 1981 cape—as if to “move like Jagger” is to perform that same Anglo-American alliance and queer patriotism.)
What I have traced here, among other things, is the incipient elements of this disaggregation and homonationalism as it begins to appear in Jagger’s performances on stage, film, and video. His enactment of sexual liberation once tied to blackness (via music and dance) later mingles with more pronounced displays of queerness, particularly in dance, but also in other modes of embodiment such as a waifish physique, cultivated androgyny, patriotic costumes—images of the body that lie far from the virile black masculinity most politicized and commodified. The whitening of Britishness and Anglicizing of Jagger’s sexual rebelliousness coincided with the economic stagnation of England and America in the 1970s and 1980s, blamed on social welfare programs and immigration by both Reagan and Thatcher, who ushered in the neoliberal era of deregulation, privatization, and global spread of capitalism. At the same time, as Bowie notes, rock ’n’ roll is part of this global economy, and, as a type of family

Figure 12. Anton Corbijn portrait of Mick Jagger (1996). Courtesy Anton Corbijn/Contour by Getty
structure that certain nations need, it socializes endless generations of consumers.

“Mick Jagger as mother,” then, is not so shocking after all, for this conjoining of seemingly antithetical terms perfectly encapsulates the nexus of sexual desire, capitalistic consumption, and the conservation of the family as a necessary site for both. Jagger—the white singer with “insinuating Blackness,” the fetish object, the magical commodity, the white British entrepreneur in a free market of movement and body type—is also the model queer citizen at the dawn of the homonational era.

Notes

I thank the following scholars for their contributions to this project: Naminata Diabate, Kate Morris, Lorenzo Perillo, Camille Robcis, and the two readers for Social Text.


2. Ibid., 58.


7. The others are “Around and Around” by Chuck Berry; “It’s All Over Now” by Bobby Womack and Shirley Womack; “I’m Alright” by Bo Diddley; and “Time Is on My Side” written by Jerry Ragovoy and a hit song for soul singer Irma Thomas in 1963. Only “Off the Hook” was a Jagger-Richards original.


23. In the intervening years between the two statements, one in 1972 and the other in 1974, Rolling Stones released *Goats Head Soup* (1973) and David Bowie released *Aladdin Sane* (1973), which included Rolling Stones–style Chuck Berry riffs (“Watch That Man”) and a cover of “Let’s Spend the Night Together.” Bowie and Jagger had also entered a public flirtation; see Lester Bangs, “1973 Nervous Breakdown: The Ol’ Fey Outlaws Ain’t What They Used to Be—Are You?,” in *Mainlines, Blood Feasts, and Bad Tastes: A Lester Bangs Reader*, ed. John Morthland (New York: Anchor Books, 2003), 148–49.


34. “Long Tall Mama” (1932) by Big Bill Bronzy; “Rollin’ Mama Blues” (1932) by Blind Willie McTell.
37. Ibid., 204.
39. Quoted in ibid., 130.
42. Margo Natalie Crawford, Dilution Anxiety and the Black Phallus (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2008), 10.
46. Keith Richards, Life (New York: Little, Brown, 2010), 82.
48. Ibid., 190, 192.
52. See Millard, “Anti-Beatles.”
56. For most of their songs of the 1960s, Richards primarily wrote the music and Jagger primarily wrote the lyrics, which is the case with “Satisfaction.” See Richards, *Life*, 176–77.
57. Ibid., 176.
70. The film was originally titled *One Plus One* and premiered on 29 November 1968 at the London Film Festival, and on 22 April 1969 in San Francisco. It was written and directed by Jean-Luc Godard, produced by Michael Pearson and Iain Quarrier, and distributed by New Line Cinema. The producers re-titled the film as...
Sympathy for the Devil and added a final complete rendition of the title song for the film’s general release in 1971.


73. Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks, 133, 135.

74. Ibid., 160.


76. Ed McCormack, quoted in ibid., 122.


78. Ibid., 160.

79. See Lott, Love and Theft, 111, 131–35.

80. Dalton notes, “In the tradition of music hall, Mick’s ventriloquism has sometimes bordered on black face, as in ‘Around and Around’ (o de clap o’ my hands) or on the live version of ‘Love in Vain’ (de train come in de station)—Robert Johnson would have walked out of his kitchen” (“Introduction,” 45). Such vocal black face also occurs in the song “Sweet Black Angel.”


84. Quoted in from Ferris, “David Bowie in America,” 40; and Werner, “Jagger Remembers,” 66.


89. The photo was taken on the set of the movie Bent, in which Jagger plays a drag queen during World War II.