
Representations of Swinging London in 1960s British Cinema:
Blowup (1966), *Smashing Time* (1967) and *Performance* (1970)

by

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Abstract

This thesis explores the representation of Swinging London in three examples of 1960s British cinema: *Blowup* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1966), *Smashing Time* (Desmond Davis, 1967) and *Performance* (Donald Cammell and Nicolas Roeg, 1970). It suggests that the films chronologically signify the evolution, commodification and dissolution of the Swinging London era. The thesis explores how the concept of Swinging London is both critiqued and perpetuated in each film through the use of visual tropes: the reconstruction of London as a cinematic space; the Pop photographer; the dolly; representations of music performance and fashion; the appropriation of signs and symbols associated with the visual culture of Swinging London. Using fashion, music performance, consumerism and cultural symbolism as visual narratives, each film also explores the construction of youth identity through the representation of manufactured and mediated images.

Ultimately, these films reinforce Swinging London as a visual economy that circulates media images as commodities within a system of exchange. With this in view, the signs and symbols that comprise the visual culture of Swinging London are as central and significant to the cultural era as their material reality. While they attempt to destabilize prevailing representations of the era through the reproduction and exchange of such symbols, *Blowup*, *Smashing Time*, and *Performance* nevertheless contribute to the nostalgia for Swinging London in larger cultural memory.

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Introduction

As a distinct media spectacle, Swinging London embodied the exploitation and commodification of youth cultural practices in post-war Britain. Accordingly, the representation of Swinging London in 1960s British cinema portrays the cultural time period as a manufactured media landscape in which visual commodities were paramount in popular representations of youth culture. Specifically, this thesis will focus on an analysis of three films produced in England during the cultural time period associated with Swinging London: *Blowup* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1966), *Smashing Time* (Desmond Davis, 1967), and *Performance* (Donald Cammell and Nicolas Roeg, 1970). I will argue that these particular films chronologically signify the evolution, commodification and dissolution of the Swinging London era. While each film offers distinct representations of Swinging London and youth culture, they also posit engaging social critiques of the media fabrication of Swinging London and reflect a larger cultural condition outside of their individual filmic space.

This thesis explores how the cultural myth of Swinging London is both critiqued and perpetuated in each film. Using fashion, music performance, and cultural symbolism as visual narratives, each film also explores the construction of youth identity through the representation of manufactured images. Overall, these texts reflect the complexities of reconstructing a fleeting cultural moment in the cinematic form, while simultaneously embodying the profitable visual economy associated with media representations of Swinging London and youth culture during the mid to late 1960s.

In terms of methodology, the thesis will employ a visual culture approach to analyzing the representations of Swinging London in each film. As Marita Sturken and

Lisa Cartwright suggest in *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture*, the study of visual culture is concerned with “the shared practices of a group, community, or society through which meanings are made out of the visual, aural, and textual world of representations and the ways that looking practices are engaged in symbolic and communicative activities.”¹ With this in view, Swinging London can be regarded as a visual economy that circulates media images as commodities within a system of exchange. Further, the signs and symbols that comprise the visual culture of Swinging London are as central and significant to the cultural era as their material reality. While *Blowup*, *Smashing Time*, and *Performance* attempt to destabilize such symbols, their representations of the time period and youth culture nevertheless contribute to the nostalgia for Swinging London in larger cultural memory.

Through an emphasis on mise-en-scène, art direction, script and characterization, the thesis will question the representations of youth culture in each film within the larger discursive framework of the time period, exploring the ways in which these texts are critical and reflective of their cultural production. In order to achieve this, the thesis also adopts a cultural studies approach to discussing visual culture, which is primarily concerned with a text's social life and history; how texts operate within the cycle of production, circulation, and consumption; the ways in which the material properties of texts are intertwined with the active social processes of looking and historically specific forms of visuality; and the understanding of texts as representations, specifically reflective of the cultural context in which they are produced.² This regard for texts as sites in which meanings are transformed and accumulated is crucial to understanding the

signs and symbols that constitute familiar Swinging London iconography, and how such icons become intertwined with the representations of youth culture posited in each film. Thus, the thesis does not employ an auteur or political economy approach to studying these three particular films; rather, the project is much more concerned with how the films circulated and responded to the culture in which they were produced and consumed.

Structurally, the thesis is divided into four principal chapters: Chapter 1 focuses on the discourses of Swinging London, the reconstruction of London as a major tourist destination during the post-war period, the construction of Swinging London and youth culture as media spectacles, the expanding cultural industries associated with music, fashion, and cinema, and the development of the Pop lifestyle, a new mode of youth consumption. Chapters 2-4 consist respectively of individual analyses of *Blowup*, *Smashing Time*, and *Performance* and their representation of the various visual economies that constitute youth fashion, music performance, and Swinging London in relation to the cultural context in which they were produced. A conclusion offers a reflection on the main ideas explored in each chapter and provides further points of interest through which the thesis could be extended to areas of academic research relating to the cultural time period in relation to visual culture, cinema and youth culture.

Notes

¹ Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright, *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture*. 2nd ed., (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 3.

² See Martin Lister and Liz Wells. "Seeing Beyond Belief: Cultural Studies as an Approach to Analysing the Visual." *Handbook of Visual Analysis*. ed. T. Van Leeuwen and C. Jewitt (London: Sage Publications, 2001), 60-91.

Chapter 1: The Discourses of Swinging London (1964-70)

London

After World War II, London emerged as an increasingly coded and commodified social world constructed by the dominant ideological apparatus through the mass media. In particular, the Blitz bombings created a massive shift in the spatial geography of the city, and the eventual rebuilding of particular areas of London in the post-war period was conducive to the re-establishment of the city as a major urban centre in the early 1960s. This shift was pivotal to the reconstruction of the city as a profitable tourist destination, as well as the mapping of social spaces designated for emerging youth practices in a consumerist era.

In *London: The Biography*, Peter Ackroyd notes that, during this time, London was becoming once more a young city, due to the rising birth rate and the accelerating prosperity of London in the 1950s, which helped to create a younger population interested in divesting itself of the limitations and restrictions of the postwar capital. While there was no sudden transition to the Swinging Sixties, Ackroyd emphasizes that “for a few years, [London] became the ‘style capital’ where music and fashion attracted the ancillary industries of magazine publishing, photography, advertising, modelling, broadcasting and film-making to create a bright new city.”¹ The emergence of a distinct and moderately affluent youth culture in Britain, coupled with an interest in youth-oriented British popular music in the form of The Beatles from Liverpool, led to the powerful presence of Beatlemania in both American and British media during 1963, introducing new youth cultural influences, styles, and modes of expression for members of the baby boomer generation. Similarly, the group’s forays into cinema, *A Hard Day’s*

Night (1964) and *Help!* (1965), both directed by Richard Lester, established British cinema as a way to construct mediated youth images and narratives, comparable to the press and television. While the historical context of Swinging London allowed for post-war youth culture to explore new lifestyle practices and modes of consumption, the creation and fabrication of Swinging London as a media spectacle stands as a prime example of cultural myth making.² Ultimately, the introduction of the term “Swinging London” in the larger cultural sphere by the press aimed both to regenerate and to exploit the cultural resources of London and youth culture during the mid to late 1960s.

Swinging London as media spectacle

Primarily, the construction of Swinging London as a cultural concept and media spectacle can be traced to two publications: John Crosby’s 26 April 1965 article in *The Daily Telegraph*, “London, The Most Exciting City in the World,” and *Time’s* 15 April 1966 special edition issue, *London: The Swinging City*, which features Piri Halasz’ article entitled “London: The Swinging City – You Can Walk Across it On the Grass.”

In his article, Crosby addresses the influence of emerging youth practices on Britain’s culture industry, “the breakdown of the old establishment,”³ or what Jonathan Green notes as “the collapse of class stratifications.”⁴ The issue of class is central to the myth of Swinging London as a “classless society administered by a new elite or ‘New Aristocracy,’ selected on the basis of merit whose talents for design and innovation provided a seemingly inexhaustible supply of new images and new products.”⁵ The so-called New Aristocracy refers to the Chelsea Set, a group of individuals involved in the emerging youth culture industries, such as fashion, music, the arts, and London nightlife. Such progenitors were affluent, upper class individuals, and their social status conflicts

with the myth of Swinging London as a classless youth society. Green concurs: “despite a claim that ‘suddenly, the young own the town,’ [Crosby’s article] focused firmly on a small, if highly visible section of those young: the rich, the successful and the well-connected.”⁶ Crosby’s discussion of such youthful talent as Mary Quant, Julie Christie, David Bailey, and Carnaby Street proprietor John Stephen helps to inscribe a veritable cast of characters that inhabit the constructed landscape of Swinging London promoted in mass media representations of the city from the mid to late 1960s. Similarly, the article blurs Central London, where much of this activity occurred, with London as a larger symbol of youth, conflating specific geographical locations in an attempt to symbolize the city as a large ‘swinging’ youth space.

Undoubtedly, the *Time* article helps to unearth the construction of Swinging London as a distinct media spectacle that attempted to profit from various youth cultural practices. As suggested by Christopher Breward in his introduction to *Swinging Sixties*, “perhaps more than any other artefact from the mid-1960s [the *Time* feature] expressed all that was distinctive about the culture of the British capital.”⁷ Yet, “by announcing the existence of ‘The Swinging City’, *Time* both named a cultural phenomenon and simultaneously sealed its fate.”⁸ Further, he notes that

in many ways *Time*’s ‘Swinging City’ issue set one of the most enduring templates for subsequent understandings of the ‘Swinging Sixties’, at least as an archetype. Fashion innovation and pleasurable consumption were at its heart, but it also incorporated a set of relationships between the values of old and new Britain, and between London and the rest of the world [...] *Time* seemed to record a new irreverent spirit in British social attitudes that ushered in a meritocratic sensibility and ignored the prejudices of a hidebound establishment.⁹

In a similar manner to Crosby’s article, Halasz addresses the breakdown of social and class distinctions, describing Britain as being “in the midst of a bloodless revolution

[involving] a swinging meritocracy [...] A new group of people is emerging into society, creating a kind of classlessness and a verve which has not been seen before.”¹⁰ With such bold proclamations as “London, a city steeped in tradition, seized by change, liberated by affluence [...] in a decade dominated by youth, London has burst into bloom. It swings; it is the scene,”¹¹ Halasz’ article introduces the phrase “Swinging London” to define the city as a site of new cultural attitudes and lifestyles in an editorial language rife with youthful colloquialisms and aphorisms:

This spring, as never before in modern times, London is switched on. Ancient elegance and new opulence are all tangled up in a dazzling blur of op and pop. The city is alive with birds (girls) and beatles, buzzing with minicars and telly stars, pulsing with half a dozen separate veins of excitement [...] In a once sedate world of faded splendor, everything new, uninhibited and kinky is blooming at the tip of London life.¹²

According to Andrea Adam, a member of the team who assembled the *Time* exposé, “the expression ‘swinging London’ just came out of the blue. We knew that there actually was a phenomenon going on in London which kind of differed from what was going on in the States and the London Sixties has this mystique [...] Amazing, utterly exotic. For us it was where it was at.”¹³ Simon Rycroft also confirms that *Time*’s portrayal of Swinging London was “not to be a cover feature, but was to be used as a structuring concept woven into accounts of the changes in the fabric of London, a city with which [the staff at the magazine] had all become fascinated.”¹⁴ Importantly, the publication’s attempt to capture a youth ethos in the feature enhanced the positioning of Swinging London as a media spectacle in larger popular culture. Additional sites of interest, such as the fashion district spearheaded by Stephen in Carnaby Street, became further locales of wonder and fascination. In *Revolt into Style* (1970), George Melly provides a contextual analysis and critique of Swinging London as a media myth and spectacle. As he suggests, “the press

picked it up [the boutiques and youth fashions on Carnaby Street] and in no time at all it was world famous - a London spectacle on par with the Tower or the Changing of the Guard.”¹⁵ Overall, the *Time* exposé implicates the concept of Swinging London as a new export commodity through the commodification of youth culture:

London is not keeping the good news to itself. From Carnaby Street, the new, way-out fashion in young men’s clothes is spreading around the globe, and so are the hairdos, the hairdont’s and the sound of the beat [...] London is exporting its plays, its films, its fads, its styles, its people. It is also the place to go. It has become the latest mecca.¹⁶

When applied to an analysis of the three films, the cover image (see Appendix, fig. 1) demonstrates how visual representations of Swinging London have the capacity both to perpetuate and to critique mass media representations of youth culture. By appropriating and re-interpreting signifiers associated with British youth, Dickinson’s cover constructs a mythic landscape in which representative characters contribute to a distinct visual lexicon of Swinging London iconography. The *Time* cover image (see Appendix, fig. 1) references various facets of the British culture industry, including the youth discotheque and nightclub, a reference to cinema in the form of an advertisement for the 1966 film, *Alfie*, examples of male and female youth fashion (embodied in the female dolly bird and male Mod dandy, who wear a mini-skirt, bellbottoms and a double-breasted suit jacket respectively), and music (a figure in the foreground wears a Who t-shirt, complete with union jack sunglasses). Traditional symbols of British culture, such as Big Ben and the Union Jack are transformed into images of youthful pleasure, with the latter acting as a repetitive motif in the “British made: The Who” logo in the foreground of the image, as well as the background for the *Time* Magazine title head. Ultimately, the *Time* cover image is a precursor to the establishment of a distinct visual lexicon of Swinging London

iconography, which subsequently informs the three films' reconstruction of Swinging London as part of their overall narrative.

Myth and the Commodification of Youth Culture: The Pop Generation

The development of an affluent youth culture in the context of Swinging London can be linked to three visual and discursive modes of youth subcultural expression: the Teddy Boys of the 1950s, the Mods of the 1960s, and the Hippies of the late 1960s-early 1970s, all of which contributed to the proliferation of British youth cultural practices associated with consumption, music, and fashion during the 1960s. In particular, the fashion styles related to each subculture provide a tangible image for media portrayals of youth, which participants in the larger cultural sphere could use to construct their subjectivity on the basis of appropriation and consumption outside of the geographical locales of each subculture.

Defining post-war youth as “the Pop generation” or “‘children of the Age of Mass-Communication’, brought up on the mass media and consumerism,” Nigel Whiteley suggests that “the way they reduced change and expendability to aspects of fashion made them [...] unknowing consumers and, therefore, prey to exploitation.”¹⁷ Here, the commodification of youth style is synonymous with the propagation of Swinging London as a distinct signifier of youth culture in Britain. This can be extended to the positioning of youth culture as a commodity within various media representations throughout the decade.

As a “a fleeting moment of mythmaking,”¹⁸ Swinging London offered a space in which youth culture was commodified. In particular, the exploitation of Mod culture

provided a distinct British export for both American and European markets during the mid to late 1960s. Dick Hebdige notes that the Mod subculture originally consisted of “working class teenagers who lived mainly in London and the new towns of the South and who could readily be identified by characteristic hairstyles, clothing etc.”¹⁹ This particular geographically located and male-oriented subculture borrowed pre-existing commodities from the world of consumer goods and reworked them into a new stylistic ensemble that expressed subcultural, rather than dominant values, raising “consumption, the commodity, [and] style itself to a new level – a sort of ‘fetishizing’ of style.”²⁰ In *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, Hebdige defines style as a signifying practice in the construction of youth subcultural identity; subcultures communicate their signification through the appropriation of pre-existing commodities from dominant culture, which are infused with a set of shared subcultural sensibilities and stylistic codes in the ritual of re-contextualization. Through a semiotic analysis in which “every object may be viewed...as a sign,”²¹ Hebdige argues that Mod style is indebted to the commodity form: the Mods are “precariously placed between the worlds of the straight and the deviant. They display their own codes [...] or at least demonstrate that codes are there to be used and abused.”²² While the mod subculture “constituted a parody of the consumer society in which they were situated,”²³ the creation of Mod style in larger popular culture “provokes a double response: it is alternately celebrated (in the fashion page) and ridiculed or reviled (in those articles which define subcultures as social problems).”²⁴ In particular, Twiggy exemplifies the commodification of subcultural style and the diffusion of Swinging London style in larger popular culture; born Leslie Hornby, Twiggy’s transformation as a distinct Pop icon, or “child of the media”²⁵ erased her working-class

background origins and elevated her status as a youth representative of Swinging London. Further, her Mod fashion style was commodified and sold as a clothing line directed towards an American female audience, further enhancing youth culture as a profitable British export in the context of Swinging London.

As youth subcultures resisted the dominant order of mainstream culture through various modes of signification, the commodification of subcultural style poses a significant threat to the notion of fashion and music as authentic forms of youth expression. Hebdige states, “the creation and diffusion of new styles is inextricably bound up with the process of production, publicity and packaging which must inevitably lead to the defusion of the subculture’s subversive power – both mod and punk innovations led back directly into high fashion and mainstream fashion.”²⁶ The relationship between commodified Mod style and the concept of Swinging London also implies an additional site of cultural fascination and marketable export in the context of British cinema. Hebdige argues:

As soon as the original innovations which signify ‘subculture’ are translated into commodities and made generally available, they become ‘frozen’. Once removed from their private contexts by the small entrepreneurs and big fashion interests who produce them on a mass scale, they become codified, made comprehensible, rendered at once public property and profitable merchandise. In this way, the two forms of incorporation (the semantic/ideological and the ‘real’/commercial) can be said to converge on the commodity form.²⁷

With the eventual commercialization of Mod style, consumer rituals were “refined and multiplied ad infinitum and came to involve the use of commodities directed specifically at a ‘Mod’ market by a rapidly expanding pop industry. Dress was no long innovative-nobody ‘discovered’ items anymore. Style was manufactured from above instead of being spontaneously created from within.”²⁸ Thus, the term “‘mod’ eventually referred to

several distinct styles, being essentially an umbrella-term used to cover everything which contributed to the recently launched myth of ‘Swinging London’.”²⁹ As suggested by John Clarke in Andy Brown’s “Rethinking the Subcultural Commodity:”

the whole mid-1960s explosion of ‘Swinging London’ was based on the massive commercial diffusion of what were originally, essentially Mod styles, mediated through [media] networks, and finally into a ‘mass’ cultural and commercial phenomenon...what was in origin a subcultural style became transformed, through increasing commercial organisation and fashionable expropriation, into a pure ‘market’ or ‘consumer style’.³⁰

Eventually, Mod style was, as Brown suggests, “transformed into empty fetishes, objects to be desired, fondled and valued in their own right.”³¹ Here, Twiggy stands as a more than apt example; her image was disseminated through such popular media as newspapers, television, and the press, which ultimately transformed her into a commodity form and fashionable expropriation of British popular culture, as well as so-called Swinging London.

Similarly, media representations of youth culture from mid-decade highlight the emerging youth music and fashion industries, and in many ways counter the broad critiques of Swinging London posited in each film analyzed later in the thesis. In particular, The Rank Organization’s *Look at Life: In Gear*, Pathé Pictorial’s *Picturing this Colourful World: Swinging Britain* and Peter Whitehead’s documentary *Tonite Let’s All Make Love In London: A Pop Concerto for Film* all construct media representations of youth culture for a mass audience that capitalize on subcultural modes of expression, particularly music, fashion, and boutique culture. These texts were all produced in 1967, a year in which the commodification of Swinging London as a hip export of British culture was in full effect in the larger cultural sphere. As such, these examples document the shift in portraying youth sartorial trends, from the appearance of authentic Mod

clothing to a more commodified Swinging London style, and the eventual influence of psychedelia and hippie fashions during late 1960s Britain. The screening of documentary images in public cinemas creates a dual layer of mediation in relation to the representation of youth culture in film, enhancing the medium's role as a powerful, yet somewhat exploitive, pedagogical tool.³² While newsreels and pictorials were an ephemeral form of news media, the following examples should be considered as integral components in perpetuating the myth of Swinging London in larger cultural memory.³³

The Rank Organization, *Look at Life: In Gear*, 1967

The Rank Organization's newsreel *Look at Life: In Gear* documents the rise and influence of boutique culture in relation to youth fashion consumption practices. Narrated by Michael Ingrams, the newsreel provides mediated glimpses into the popular districts and destinations related to boutique culture, particularly *Granny Takes a Trip*, *Hung On You*, *Biba* (Kensington Church Street), *I Was Lord Kitchener's Valet*, and *John Stephen's* multiple boutiques on Carnaby Street. At times, Ingrams' narration relies on trendy youth language, most notable in the introduction: "They say London swings. It doesn't. Not even the Kings Road, Chelsea. But here and there among the conformist fat cat crowds, is a lean cat or two, looking like it might swing, given some encouragement."

In this cultural document, post-war youth culture is positioned as a fascinating oddity, somewhat displaced and separate from mainstream culture: "In among the chain stores and supermarkets is here and there a shop, that may have something all its own to say [...] to people who can put living before *a* living." In particular, Ingrams' description of *Granny Takes a Trip* addresses language as a prime signifier of youth discourse:

“Granny Takes a Trip, the shop behind the face calls itself, and it’s typical of the non-typical. Conforming to the non-conformist image of the in. What they used to call ‘way out,’ and before that ‘with it,’ and before that ‘groovy’ and before that ‘hep,’ and what granny herself would have called, ‘the very latest thing, my dear.’”

The interior shots of the boutique reveal the different styles and symbols that comprised many mid 1960s Swinging London boutique interiors: an assemblage of antiques, “delightful relics from Britain’s past,” such as a victrola swathed in colourful men’s ties, graphic reproductions of Victorian drawings, and large antique mirrors. The appropriation of these objects for aesthetic purposes converges different youth styles and heightens boutiques as total consumer environments. Switching locations, the newsreel takes the viewer to “the acutely named I Was Lord Kitchener’s Valet, [where] youth buy uniforms of the past to affront the uniformity of the present [...] One way to say no to authority is to parody it. Some of the young with little to say yes to, come to Soho: that pulsating heart of Swinging London.” Importantly, *In Gear* documents the shift in fashion trends in relation to the influence of independent boutique style on a youth consumer audience. Ingrams elaborates:

these soft music, loud caverns of the avant-garde can be misleading, for they are the work cells of revolution. Once upon a time, just a year or two ago, to be precise, fashion originated in the haute couture salons of Paris, then spread downwards through society in ever-cheapening copies, with one predominant theme. Shops such as this would have interpreted the mold – but no more. Now, they originate, and so do a dozen others, in a dozen styles, owing nothing to Paris, or anyone else.

While *In Gear* captures some of the realities pertaining to Swinging London, namely boutique culture, fashion, and consumerism, youth culture is positioned as “childhood innocence at war with the hard adult world, the fun of dressing up,” where “it’s all

another tiny coloured womb, warm and gentle, in a way an escape from the H- bomb, television, and other horrors of the workaday world.” Ingrams’ final comment, “just don’t take it too seriously, or you’ll miss the whole point,” typifies the media framing of this particular youth culture as escapist consumers at play.

Pathé Pictorial, *Picturing this Colourful World: Swinging Britain, 1967*

Similarly, Pathé Pictorial’s newsreel, *Picturing this Colourful World: Swinging Britain* offers a constructed media representation of youth culture in the context of Swinging London. As noted in the newsreel’s introduction, both youth culture and London are positioned as varying forms of spectacle to be viewed by a mass audience: “This ladies and gentlemen, is London. Swinging London, its been called, although some people might think of a different adjective. Social rebels have taken over in what seems more like an invasion than a revolution, because they’ve got their own new language, which is way out and weird, to say the least.” Here, youth culture is positioned as separate from parent, or mainstream culture, and its struggle to differentiate becomes part of a longer, historical narrative: “Remember, youth has always had a fight to assert its independence. And it’s always had its successes; the Teddy-Boy seems traditional compared to this.” Reinforcing the newsreel as a construction, the narration further positions youth culture as a kind of spectacle in this context: “We’re watching these wayward kids critically, but detached [...] Baffling what we see...because this is a different generation making mistakes, while desperately trying to find an identity.”

Combining authentic location shots with a highly constructed narrative, the newsreel juxtaposes somewhat accurate portrayals of youth activity around London with

highly constructed Swinging London scenarios. One of the narratives features an inside look at *Intro Magazine*, a fictitious publication that attempts to document the youthful activity of Swinging London. It is through the magazine that “youth talks directly to youth,” although, the magazine’s interest in documenting youth discourses mirrors the newsreel as a visual form of news sharing. The newsreel also features exterior and interior shots of I Was Lord Kitchener’s Valet, youth activity on Carnaby Street, and Biba, symbols associated with Swinging London, such as the paper dress, the Union Jack, the swinging nightclub discothèque (The Speakeasy), Bob Dylan, the phonograph, and disc jockey Simon Dee.³⁴

Further, the newsreel addresses the mass production and exportation of Swinging London style by focusing on fashion designer Mary Quant, the proprietor of Bazaar. The worldwide impact of Swinging London style on popular culture is apparent in the narration:

in the fashion world, youth talks to youth. Mary Quant is just one of the breakaway generation who has now dreamed up a revolutionary approach to young cosmetics, which even department stores like Selfridges have taken up. Remember, that this is big export business too: like The Beatles and the freaky fashions this young generation created to some horror.

The concluding voice-over of the newsreel, “like it or not, this gives us a valid picture of Swinging youth, at work and at play,” suggests that media images are a central component in the construction of youth culture as a profitable form of spectacle, while at the same time asserting that the representation of “swinging youth” offered in the newsreel is, indeed, “a valid picture” of the cultural period, and not a fabricated construction.

Tonite Let's All Make Love in London: A Pop Concerto for Film, 1967

Conversely, Whitehead's documentary, *Tonite Let's All Make Love in London*, attempts to portray an authentic representation of the British youth experience in London, although the "pop concerto" still produces a constructed image of youth discourse. Compiled as a series of chapters, the documentary interviews various representatives of the music, fashion, film, and arts scenes in order to engage with the notion of youth culture and the media myth of Swinging London.

The opening sequence entitled "Chapter 1: The City Happening" features blurry, juxtaposed images of London and youth culture set to the music of the Pink Floyd's "Interstellar Overdrive." The footage of the band performing this music at a nightclub suggests youth culture as an underground, hidden endeavour that is separate, or rejected from mainstream British society. Further, the introduction features recognizable images and icons associated with Swinging London; the double-decker bus, dancing youths, a close-up shot of the *Time* "London: The Swinging City" cover and various examples of print media that reference youth culture as a phenomenon in Swinging London (the headline "mini skirts and mini morals" from an article by Billy Graham, and a *Playboy* feature entitled "*Playboy* on the town in London: A swinger's guide to good times in the land of Mod"). Overall, Whitehead's documentary is more scandalous than the newsreels in its suggestions of youth as a sexually liberated culture whose morality is expressed through music, fashion, the arts, and consumption.

Chapter Two of Whitehead's film is dedicated to "Dollygirls" and changes the ontological status and terminology of the dollybird to dollygirl. By positioning dollygirls with girl culture consumer practices, the documentary creates an attainable image of

youth identity for a female consumer audience. The vignette opens with a panned image of a female mannequin adorned in a space-age style silver mini-skirt, and showcases multiple images of dollygirls in their natural, consumerist habitats. The viewer is provided with glimpses of dollygirl discourse in Kensington through the iconic storefront of the Church St. Biba location, and an interesting juxtaposition of dollygirls window-shopping alongside nuns.³⁵ Whitehead's use of the interview format with one particular female attempts an authentic insight into dolly discourse, yet the interview provides a constructed image of youth through the process of editing and selection. According to the interviewee, who is situated on a carnival ride, "a dollygirl is someone who dresses as she feels, she does what she likes, she's free [...] she doesn't care about convention [and] has a wonderful time. How else could you describe a dollygirl? Probably young."

Whitehead attempts an authentic representation of Swinging London by interviewing specific Pop icons such as Mick Jagger, Julie Christie, and Andrew Loog Oldham, but such a selection reiterates the class hierarchy and exclusionary nature of Swinging London discourse for outsider youths.³⁶ Although Whitehead attempts to critique dominant media representations of Swinging London by addressing the dissolution of class hierarchies and emergence of a distinct youth counterculture in Britain in "Chapter 1: The Fall of the British Empire," with references to Buckingham Palace and "the changing of the guard," *Tonite Let's All Make Love in London* contributes to the constructed media representations of post-war youths during the period through its constructed representations of youth culture.

Swinging London as Style

The shift in language presented in Whitehead's documentary can also be transposed to the shifting ontology of popular and youth culture during the mid to late 1960s. In *Revolt into Style*, Melly distinguishes between popular culture and what he calls 'pop' culture, which is "non-reflective, non-didactic, dedicated only to pleasure. It changes constantly [and] its principal faculty is to catch the spirit of its time and translate this spirit into objects or music or fashion or behaviour."³⁷ Further, he outlines three separate meanings pertaining to the visual affectations of pop culture, and by association, the visual culture of Swinging London:

Firstly, intellectual pop: that is, works of art created quite consciously in homage to pop culture. Secondly sophisticated artefacts created to sell the produce they either advertised or decorated to the pop public. Thirdly visual decoration or visual selection which either the pop public or a section of it decided to be relevant to its life-style.³⁸

Here, the influence of the British Pop Art movement is emphasized as an additional source from which the signs and symbols associated with Swinging London were appropriated and explored. As suggested in Simon Rycroft's "The Geographies of Swinging London":

Swinging London style was not totally devoid of content. It is clear that the Pop Art movement was a major aesthetic antecedent. As a largely London based phenomenon in Britain, Pop Art, by dissolving accepted rigidities in the conception of culture, moralism taste and manners, and forming the 'Long Front of culture' was able to 'set a style for the spectacle of Kings Road.' This new look had spread from the walls of 'Mayfair art galleries to hats, handbags, furniture, wallpaper and even make-up'. Pop artists self-consciously and ironically celebrated the brash commercialism and burgeoning consumer culture of the late 1950s.³⁹

Similarly, the mid-1950s saw the development of a cultural theory of expendability, initially proposed by members of the Independent Group, a loosely-knit discussion group

which involved Lawrence Alloway, Reyner Banham, John McHale, and Richard Hamilton. While the Independent Group focused its initial attention on American popular culture's mass-produced iconography, the re-assemblage of appropriated images fostered the group's social critique of consumer culture. As evident in Hamilton's 1956 collage *Just what is it that makes today's home so different, so appealing?*, the development of a Pop lifestyle in conjunction with a distinctly affluent youth culture was almost predetermined by the proliferation of American mass consumer cultural goods.⁴⁰ By juxtaposing typical images drawn from such cultural categories as "man; woman; food; history; newspapers; cinemas; television; and information,"⁴¹ Hamilton's collage serves to elucidate the relationship between consumer culture and the development of a lifestyle indebted to consumption in the post-war era. In *Revolt Into Style*, Melly discusses the collage, claiming it as a prime example of "intellectual pop: that is, works of art created quite consciously in homage of pop culture."⁴² In comparison, the construction of Swinging London in cinema acts as a kind of homage, in which the representation of a particular time period becomes further problematic in relation to cultural memory and nostalgia.

The development of the Pop lifestyle in relation to youth culture was an important component of the Swinging London era. Nigel Whitely suggests style obsolescence as a popular lifestyle choice in the post-war era, a period in which Britain had entered its own high mass-consumption stage.⁴³ He notes "the 'meaning' of Pop – in which expendability was integral – was determined by your outlook on life [...] whether of things or sensations, Pop was a *lifestyle* based on *consumption*, the logical development of the consumerist society and ethos."⁴⁴ Similarly, his claim that "change and expendability

were seen by the Pop young not as a means but as ends in themselves: as a 'natural and desirable' condition; as an affirmation of life"⁴⁵ exemplifies the emergence of the Pop lifestyle as an integral component of the youth experience of Swinging London.

The New Pop Industries: Film, Music, and Fashion

The proliferation of youth cultural industries in post-war Britain, what Melly refers to as "the new pop industries, records, cheap clothes and cosmetics, transistor radios etc.,"⁴⁶ directly contributed to the emergence of youth-oriented commodities in Britain and America during the mid 1960s. Robert Murphy suggests that "for a time it seemed that the cultural industries thriving in 60s London – music, fashion, film – showed the way forward for Britain as it shuffled off its Empire and closed down its industrial heartlands."⁴⁷ In a similar manner, Caroline Evans notes, "it was in the post-war period that the idea of London fashion crystallized, as much through its imagery and media representation as in its actual clothes."⁴⁸ The influence of young fashion designers and the rise of the independent clothing boutique as harbingers of new styles and attitudes were pivotal to the construction of a distinctly visual, new form of youth culture. As such, the relationship between the expanding pop industries and style obsolescence, the symptomatic response of consumerism during this period, contributed to the inherent Pop expendability associated with Swinging London. Ultimately, the relationships between cinema, music and fashion frame each of the films analyzed in this thesis in terms of their representations and critiques of Swinging London and youth culture.

What is referred to as Swinging London, or Swinging Sixties, cinema includes a small array of films that explore the tenets of the Pop film, which focused on trendy and

youthful narratives associated with Swinging London, yet in many instances such films became disposable forms of mass entertainment. According to Jeffrey Richards, the 1960s witnessed a revitalization of British cinema. He claims:

The 1960s brought a small but influential body of films that captured the attention of critics by tackling the lifestyle and aspirations of the young and working class in a fresh un-patronizing way. They adopted an approach that was to be seen and proclaimed as sexually liberated, politically radical and socially committed.⁴⁹

Some highly regarded films from the era include *Darling* (John Schlesinger, 1965) *Kaleidoscope* (Jack Smight, 1966), *Alfie* (Lewis Gilbert, 1966), *Georgy Girl* (Sylvio Narizzano, 1966) and Richard Lester's films *A Hard Day's Night* (1964), *Help!* (1965), and *The Knack...And How to Get It* (1965), all of which represent youth culture in relation to their music preferences, choices in fashion, and "lapses into fantasy ... [which] can be seen as valid attempts to grasp the shifting realities of mid-60s Britain."⁵⁰ Richards claims "the real 'Swinging London' films don't emerge until after April 1966 when *Time* magazine published "London - The Swinging City" as its cover story," and many of the later "Swinging London" films, including *Blow-Up* and *Performance* "have an angst-ridden, almost elegiac quality about them."⁵¹ As this thesis suggests, *Blowup*, *Smashing Time*, and *Performance* stand as exemplary moments in 1960s British cinema, because "American directors made little use of the concept of Swinging London"⁵² and their production by major film studios marks a separation between British and American approaches to the reconstruction and critique of the phenomenon.

Similarly, new developments in Britain's music and fashion industries subverted traditional hierarchies of age, class and gender in relation to cultural production and consumption; the rise of the affluent teenage consumer and the independently owned

boutique contributed to the development of a distinct youth culture in post-war Britain. In particular, the emergence of independent fashion boutiques, such as Mary Quant's Bazaar and Barbara Hulanicki's Biba, provided a space for the construction of youth identity through the act of consumption. Combining music and fashion, boutiques fostered a total shopping experience and environment for young consumers. According to *In Gear*:

these soft music, loud caverns can be misleading, for they are the work cells of revolution. Once upon a time, a year or two ago to be precise, fashion originated in the haute couture salons of Paris, then spread downward through society in ever cheapening copies with one predominant theme. Shops such as this would have interpreted the mould, but no more. Now, they originate, and so do a dozen others in a dozen styles owing nothing to Paris or anyone else.

As progenitors of new forms of youth fashion and cultural attitudes, Quant and Hulanicki offered new possibilities for young women in terms of production and consumption. Their involvement in the creation and manufacturing of youth fashion styles contrasted with the masculine rhetoric of Carnaby Street. Hulanicki's original Biba boutique on Abingdon Road, Kensington and later Church Street location created affordable Mod inspired fashions for female youth. Geared towards "the democratization of style"⁵³ for a working-class female audience, Biba advocated the "'knock-down, throw-away-and-buy-another' philosophy"⁵⁴ of an increasingly disposable consumer culture.

Whiteley notes that the 1960s fashion industry serves "as the eminent model for expendability,"⁵⁵ which "was at the core of fashion design."⁵⁶ This interest in disposable fashion contributes significantly to the construction of sartorial identities in relation to personal youth style, a trope that is explored in each film under analysis in the thesis. Further, the relationship between youth culture, music, and fashion enhances what Noel McLaughlin claims as:

the centrality of music and clothes to pop's broader aestheticisation of everyday life [...] the popular music and fashion industries are regarded as sharing a close relationship: popular music is taken to play a powerful role in 'shop-windowing' and selling clothes ... and in turn, clothing has been viewed as a central part of how popular music signifies.⁵⁷

Similarly, Melly claims that in the Swinging London era, "pop music aspired to the condition of fashion, in which change was the only constant," and music was desired to be as "transitory as a paper cup."⁵⁸ This cultural shift in the regard for commodities as disposable forms of transitory desire and pleasure is expressed throughout the consumptive practices of particular characters in each film discussed in the thesis.

The Dolly and The Dandy

The accessibility of boutique fashion dissolved notions of class and social status for a working-class consumer audience and members of the social Swinging London elite. In particular, the image of the dolly replaced the mod girl archetype as the most desirable and accessible form of female youth identity. Jonathon Green explains:

the most iconic, treasured and lusted after for her youth and (apparently) free-wheeling sexuality, was the 'swinging dolly bird'. The dolly was not strictly a Sixties invention – [as the term had been used in various incarnations during the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries] but the Sixties gave it unparalleled popularity. The *ur*-dolly was probably the contemporary supermodel Jean Shrimpton. The essence of Shrimpton's look [...] was its accessibility. You too could be a dollybird, and just as swinging as 'the Shrimp' herself.⁵⁹

The influence of Shrimpton's look on consumer girl culture contributed to the construction of a standard dolly-girl image in this context. This is also apparent in Melly's flavourful description of girls involved in Swinging London discourse:

all had long clean hair, preferably blonde, interchangeable pretty faces [and] long legs. They represented girls as objects to an extraordinary degree. They produced a kind of generalized rather half-hearted lust

triggered off by their ever-shortening mini-skirts. They never spoke, the music was too loud, but they danced very well. They are almost extinct now except for a small reservation preserved apparently for use in tv advertisements.⁶⁰

Further, Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber suggest that participation in mod or dolly bird discourse was “almost wholly reliant on wearing the right clothes, having the right hairstyle, and going to the right clubs.”⁶¹ Many girls who worked in youth-oriented boutiques such as Biba, adopted the style as they “were expected to reflect the image of the shop and thus provide a kind of model or prototype for the young consumer.”⁶² However, Green suggests that while “the culture of fun cohered in the single icon of the dolly-bird” there was a strange ambivalence to the ways in which she symbolized new sexual attitudes.⁶³ The combination of childlike mini-dresses, round-toed shoes reminiscent of Fifties’ schoolgirls, and exaggerated makeup “all presented an image that while sexual, seemed at times to be geared towards paedophiles. It was a soft sexuality.”⁶⁴ Despite this, the emergence of mod girl and eventual dolly bird style emphasizes the increasing visibility and confidence of teenage girls from both working class and middle class backgrounds in the 1960s. This cultural visibility pervades the media framing of Swinging London and youth culture during the era, in which young girls are represented as dolly birds; fashionable, young, female consumers.

As a prototype of male youth identity, the dandy indicates the influence of Mod style as well as the Edwardian fashion revival in male fashion towards the end of the decade. According to Moya Luckett, the dandy was “central to both of the leading dandy-esque looks of the 1960s and 1970s – the besuited man and the peacock.”⁶⁵ Similar to the dolly, “in all its incarnations, the dandy suggested a return to British youth culture [and] represented not the predominance of the elite but rather the coming together of youth of

all classes, suggesting the possibility of social movement across various social strata.”⁶⁶ Referenced in The Kinks’ pop singles “Dandy” (1966) and “Dedicated Follower of Fashion” (1966),⁶⁷ the identity image of the dandy provided a space in which male forms of fashion and expression were contested and explored. Luckett argues that “the dandy flies in the face of conventional assumptions about men’s fashion, which, as Stella Bruzzi notes, [...] is also, the suspicion with which flamboyant male dressers like dandies and dudes have traditionally been viewed, because ‘real men’ are not supposed to be narcissistic.”⁶⁸ The emergence of dandy fashion and the regard for certain musicians as dandies importantly addresses the performing body in relation to music and fashion during the era. As evident in *Blowup*, *Smashing Time*, and *Performance*, dandy fashion influences, in part, Thomas’s appearance in *Blowup*, Charlotte Brillig’s friends in *Smashing Time*, as well as Chas and Turner’s shifting sartorial identities in *Performance*. Yet, such prototypes are offered as mediated images that are contested and explored within film space and time.

Overall, the use of the dolly and, to a lesser extent, the dandy in these films highlights the important intersections between fashion and the construction of youth identity. In addition, the dolly and dandy offer two distinct Pop prototypes associated with the visual culture of Swinging London. In these films, consumption is central to the characters’ experience of the Pop lifestyle, as well as a sartorial understanding of identity in which fashion and consumption are explored through the acquisition of commodities in keeping with the latest youth trends.

Blowup, *Smashing Time*, and *Performance* contribute to the regard for Swinging London as a distinctly visual culture, one that remains synonymous with cultural memory

and nostalgia for the time period. The following chapters offer an analysis of each film in relation to what I've determined as similar visual and narrative tropes: the reconstruction of London as a cinematic space; the use of archetypal characters, such as the Pop photographer, the dolly, music performance and fashion; the representation of the Pop lifestyle and the Pop interior, and the appropriation of signs and symbols associated with the visual culture of Swinging London. Overall, these visual and narrative tropes are implemented as vehicles for social critique, and through their varied *mise-en-scène*, the films contest the media fabricated claims of Swinging London as a utopian socialized space. However, these films not only counter media representations of youth culture through the application of a critical lens, but they also contribute to the visual culture associated with Swinging London through the exploration of established signs and symbols.

Notes

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- ¹ Peter Ackroyd, *London: The Biography* (London: Vintage, 2001), 759.
- ² *Ibid.*, 754-55.
- ³ *Ibid.*
- ⁴ Jonathan Green, *All Dressed Up: The Sixties and the Counter-culture* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1998), 72.
- ⁵ Simon Rycroft, "The Geographies of Swinging London," *Journal of Historical Geography*, 28.4 (2002), 575.
- ⁶ Green, 70.
- ⁷ Christopher Breward, *Swinging Sixties: Fashion in London and Beyond 1955-1970* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2006), 8.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, 11-12.
- ¹⁰ Piri Halasz, "London: The Swinging City – You Can Walk Across it On the Grass," *Time*, April 15, 1966, 30.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*
- ¹² *Ibid.*
- ¹³ Green, *All Dressed Up: The Sixties and the Counter-culture*, 71-72.
- ¹⁴ Rycroft, "The Geographies of Swinging London," 577.
- ¹⁵ George Melly, *Revolt into Style: The Pop Arts* (London: Penguin Press, 1970), 170.
- ¹⁶ Halasz, "London: The Swinging City – You Can Walk Across it On the Grass," 30.
- ¹⁷ Nigel Whiteley, "Toward a Throw-Away Culture. Consumerism, 'Style Obsolescence' and Cultural Theory in the 1950s and 1960s," *Oxford Art Journal*, 10. 2 (1987), 25.
- ¹⁸ Rycroft, "The Geographies of Swinging London," 571.
- ¹⁹ Dick Hebdige, "The Meaning of Mod," *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-war Britain*, 2nd ed., ed. Stuart Hall, Tony Jefferson. (New York: Routledge, 2006), 71.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*
- ²¹ Dick Hebdige, "Subculture: The Meaning of Style," *Subcultures Reader*, ed. Ken Gelder and Sarah Thornton. (London: Routledge, 1997), 134.
- ²² *Ibid.*
- ²³ Hebdige, "The Meaning of Mod," 76-77.
- ²⁴ Hebdige, "Subculture: The Meaning of Style," 131.
- ²⁵ See "Twiggy – Click! Click!," *Newsweek*, (April 10, 1967).
- ²⁶ Hebdige, "Subculture: The Meaning of Style," 132.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 141.
- ²⁸ Hebdige, "The Meaning of Mod," 78.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*
- ³⁰ John Clarke qtd. in Andy Brown, "Rethinking the Subcultural Commodity: The Case of the Heavy Metal T-shirt Culture(s)," *Youth Cultures: Scenes, Subcultures and Tribes*, ed. Paul Hodkinson and Wolfgang Deicke (New York: Routledge, 2007), 69.
- ³¹ Dick Hebdige, "Subculture: The Meaning of Style," 136.
- ³² Newsreels and pictorials were presented in cinemas usually preceding a film screening and featured filmed news stories and information of topical interest. However, this form of public media was highly constructed, and their simulated representations were misconstrued due to the lack of immediacy embedded in the medium itself.
- ³³ Newsreels disappeared from popular, public consumption by the mid 1970s. An online archive collection of British Pathé's extensive collection dating from 1896-1976 can be found on its website, <http://www.britishpathe.com>.
- ³⁴ Simon Dee was a popular radio disc jockey and television interviewer in the context of Swinging London. Further, the newsreel shows a young girl wears a paper poster dress that features a reproduced image of Bob Dylan. Interestingly, the use of Dylan as a symbol of hip, youth culture draws parallels to the construction of youth culture as both a commodified image and spectacle.
- ³⁵ Due to popular demand, Biba moved locations from 81 Abingdon Road. to 19-21 Church Street in 1966. In the documentary, nuns appear to shop at Biba alongside young girls, undoubtedly referencing a possible dissolution of social class and status hierarchies in the context of Swinging London. In particular, Biba was

regarded as a space of consumerism that appealed to everyday working-girls, rock stars, models, et al. See Barbara Hulanicki, *From A to Biba: The Autobiography of Barbara Hulanicki* (London: V & A, 1983).

³⁶ This trope is also explored in *Smashing Time*'s use of Northern girl characters that travel from their Northern origins by train to London and attempt to assimilate themselves in Swinging London discourse.

³⁷ Melly, *Revolt into Style: The Pop Arts*, 5.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 141.

³⁹ Robert Hewison qtd. in Simon Rycroft, "The Geographies of Swinging London," 572.

⁴⁰ *Just what is it...* is widely referred to as the first example of British Pop art. Importantly, it was included in the significant *This Is Tomorrow* exhibition held at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in 1956, of which Hamilton was one of thirty-six participating artists.

⁴¹ Nigel Whiteley, "Toward a Throw-Away Culture. Consumerism, 'Style Obsolescence' and Cultural Theory in the 1950s and 1960s," 11.

⁴² Melly, *Revolt into Style: The Pop Arts*, 141.

⁴³ Whiteley, "Toward a Throw-Away Culture," 17.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Melly, *Revolt into Style: The Pop Arts*, 4.

⁴⁷ Robert Murphy, *The British Cinema Book*, 3rd ed. (London: British Film Institute, 2009), 321.

⁴⁸ Caroline Evans, "Post-War Poses: 1955-75," from Christopher Breward et al., *The London Look: Fashion from Street to Catwalk*, (London: Yale University Press, 2004), 117.

⁴⁹ Jeffrey Richards, "New Waves and Old Myths: British Cinema in the 1960s," *Cultural Revolution? The Challenge of the Arts in the 1960s*, ed. Bart Moore-Gilbert and John Seed. (London: Routledge, 1992), 218.

⁵⁰ Murphy, 323.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Murphy, 140.

⁵³ See Marnie Fogg, *Boutique: A '60s Cultural Phenomenon* (London: Mitchell Beazley, 2003).

⁵⁴ Barbara Bernard, *Fashion in the '60s* (New York: St. Martins Press, 1978), 48.

⁵⁵ Nigel Whiteley, "Toward a Throw-Away Culture," 14.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁵⁷ Noel McLaughlin, "Rock, Fashion and Performativity," *Fashion Cultures: Theories, Explorations and Analysis*, ed. Stella Bruzzi and Pamela Church Gibson (London: Routledge, 2000), 264.

⁵⁸ See Melly, *Revolt into Style: The Pop Arts*, 1970.

⁵⁹ Green, *All Dressed Up: The Sixties and the Counter-culture*, 76.

⁶⁰ Melly, *Revolt into Style: The Pop Arts*, 172.

⁶¹ Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber, "Girls and Subcultures," *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*. 2nd ed., ed. Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson (New York: Routledge, 2006), 171.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Green, *All Dressed Up: The Sixties and the Counter-culture*, 76.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Moya Luckett, "Performing Masculinities: Dandyism and Male Fashion in 1960s-70s British Cinema," *Fashion Cultures: Theories, explorations and analysis*, ed. Stella Bruzzi and Pamela Church Gibson (London: Routledge, 2000), 321.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 319-20.

⁶⁷ The lyrics of these songs describe and satirize "the dandy" as well as fashion consumer practices synonymous with Swinging London and youth culture. See The Kinks, "Dandy," *Face to Face* (Pye Records, 1966) and "Dedicated Follower of Fashion" (Pye Records, 1966).

⁶⁸ Moya Luckett, "Performing Masculinities: Dandyism and Male Fashion in 1960s-70s British Cinema," 319.

Chapter 2: Blowup

“I’ve gone off London this week, it doesn’t do anything for me.” (*Blowup*, 1966)

Released in 1966, Michelangelo Antonioni’s first English language film, *Blowup*¹ intersects with the rise of Swinging London as a fabricated media spectacle. Loosely based on a short story by Argentinian writer Julio Cortazar,² and Francis Wyndham’s article entitled “The Modelmakers,”³ the film follows the pursuits of main protagonist Thomas⁴ (David Hemmings) and his daily encounters with so-called Swinging London life as a photographer-observer, including photographing models in his studio, cruising the city in his Rolls Royce, and his exploration of London as a topographical space in states of progress and renewal. The film culminates in Thomas’s mapping of a potential murder that he encounters in a park through the magnification, or blow-up, of his photographs. In the process, the film expounds on the interplay of male and female gender roles in relation to consumption, representation and sexuality.

By adopting London as the geographical location for the narrative, the film is positioned as “an astonishing glimpse of today, seen through Antonioni’s camera. [This is] his London.”⁵ Antonioni’s interest in critiquing the notion of Swinging London is evident in the film’s exploration of sites, symbols, and signifiers in relation to youth cultural practices. Ultimately, the film remains in the larger cultural consciousness as “an influential, stylish study of paranoid intrigue and disorientation. It is also a time capsule of mod London, a miniscape of the era’s fashion, free love, parties, music (Herbie Hancock wrote the score and The Yardbirds riff at a club) and hip languor.”⁶ One of the film’s main thematic tropes, the division or distinction between reality and fantasy, draws parallels to the conception of Swinging London as a constructed media spectacle and

glorification of youth cultural practices. As such, Antonioni's film not only questions the larger metaphysical concerns of perception and reality and the human faculties associated with their comprehension, but also questions the semantics of Swinging London discourse in relation to youth culture. According to Robert Murphy,

Blow-Up explores an unease about the nature of Swinging London society – in particular its immersion in fantasy – rather than the opportunities for sexual fulfilment opened up by the permissive society [...] It is a film 'constructed like a poem of thematically related images, about the way in which perceptions can be tampered with, undermined, and finally broken down.'⁷

Murphy also suggests that "the burden of representing Swinging London – the David Bailey-like hero, the guitar smashing, the casual sex, the dope-smoking party, the mime troupe with which the film begins and ends – combines with the faster rhythm of cutting imposed on the film [...] to disrupt the mysterious quality which makes [Antonioni's other films] enigmatically complex."⁸ Ultimately, *Blowup* attempts to dispel the cultural myth of Swinging London through an exploration of music, fashion, and gender relations, exploring the various inconsistencies associated with the media spectacle and its construction of London as an idealized, utopian youth space.

London as a cinematic city

In *Blowup*, characters remain as anonymous figures strewn across a reconfigured London devoid of the typical geographical locations associated with the Swinging era. As Peter Ackroyd notes, "London has always been an ugly city. It is part of its identity. It has always been rebuilt, and demolished, and vandalised. That, too, is part of its history."⁹ Due to a post-war refurbishment of the city, London was subject to multiple reconfigurations in which

vast swathes were demolished in order to make way for what became known as 'comprehensive redevelopment'. What it represented was a deliberate act of erasure, an act of forgetting, not so dissimilar in spirit to the mood and ambience of the 'Swinging Sixties' elsewhere in London. It was as if time, and London's history had, for all practical purposes ceased to exist. In pursuit of profit, and instant gratification, the past had become a foreign country.¹⁰

The reconstruction of London as a cinematic backdrop in *Blowup* serves to propagate Antonioni's critique of Swinging London and youth culture from a mature, outsider perspective. Primarily, Antonioni's construction of London as a cinematic city utilizes the unique possibilities of film. According to Michael Dear, the exploration of space and time in the film medium creates a distinct cinematic geography within the spatial ontologies of the cinematic city. This construction also reiterates the "cinematization of contemporary life - representations of the real have become stand-ins for actual, lived experiences."¹¹ Further, Dear claims there are three broad attitudes toward cinematic representations of cities: first, the city is simply "there" as background, second there is a celebratory, utopian view of the city, or thirdly, the city exists as a dystopia.¹² The appearance of these three elements in *Blowup* further elucidates Dear's assertion that "the cinematic landscape is not [...] a neutral place of entertainment or an objective documentation or mirror of the 'real', but an ideologically charged cultural creation whereby meanings of place and society are made, legitimized, contested and obscured."¹³ Interestingly, Antonioni depicts the city in a state of perpetual flux with Thomas exploring the urban landscape in various states of renewal and progress. While the city is simply 'there' as background and an integral component of the *mise-en-scène*, it also serves as a social space in which the photographer interprets and encounters the boundaries of 'the real' in his surroundings.

Similar to the mapping of Swinging London in *Time*'s feature article¹⁴ from 1966, Antonioni charts particular sites for the film's sequence of events and narrative, resulting in a film that features a topographical premise. However, these locations are not made explicit, and what results is a reconstructed London that shies away from such media-infused sites as Carnaby Street.¹⁵ Thus, the London constructed and experienced in the film unfolds on the peripheries and edges of the city in the form of non-spaces. As Ian Buchanan asserts, non-space involves "a kind of travel that is to be written under erasure – one has gone there, without having been there."¹⁶ Further, he states that "we swim through places more than we dwell there and consequently a new type of social space has emerged whose precise purpose is to facilitate a frictionless passage – airports, train stations, bus terminals, fast food outlets, supermarkets and hotels. Because they do not confer a sense of place, [Marc] Augé calls these places non-places."¹⁷ In the film, Thomas drifts in a sea of non-places within the constructed cinematic space, experiencing a fragmented city in the process. Although provoked to confront the reality, or hyperreality of this construction, he encounters various forms of social space that facilitate a "frictionless passage"¹⁸ of a misconstrued experience of the 'real.' Throughout the film, Thomas experiences both 'real' and 'non-real' London (so-called 'Swinging London'), and his confrontation of perception and reality climaxes with the film's tennis court scene in the park that takes place during the final sequence. Here, Thomas participates in the mimes' imaginary tennis match by picking up the imaginary tennis ball and tossing it back to the court; his gaze follows the imaginary ball's fall to the court, and by doing so, Thomas engages in a suspension of disbelief in his surroundings. By participating in the frivolity of the troupe's childish games, Thomas also experiences a

dislocation of subjectivity, and subsequently fades into disappearance, acknowledging his presence as a fictional construction.

The Photographer as Pop Hero

According to Martin Harrison, *Blowup* defined the public's image of the 1960s fashion photographer,¹⁹ and the film's protagonist embodies the archetypal Swinging London male photographer. Influenced in part by the career and romantic pursuits of top London photographer David Bailey,²⁰ Antonioni's film depicts Thomas's Pop lifestyle, one involving disposability, consumption, image-making, and women. As a Swinging London flâneur, Thomas embodies the Pop lifestyle, yet eventually becomes disillusioned with so-called Swinging London and ultimately questions some of the starker realities of post-war London.²¹ Hemmings' portrayal of the photographer character also draws on his personal experience of making the film, interpreting the script, as well as Antonioni's style of direction.²²

As Melly claims, "[the pop photographer] is in the position to move between two worlds, that of high fashion and the pop world, carrying the ideas and rage for the new form from one to the other."²³ He connects this to his discussions on Pop: "side by side with the idea of the photograph as pop medium has arisen the concept of the photographer as pop hero. Every idea about pop favours this myth: the balance between technical expertise and intellectual indifference, the camera's amorality, the availability and disposability [of the medium]."²⁴ The photographer as image-maker also enhances the role of the image as a pervasive trope in the Swinging London discourse. Further, the use of a photographer persona in *Blowup* contributes significantly to Swinging London's

dependence on icons and archetypes as a visibly distinct media spectacle. According to Melly, “[in the context of Swinging London], the personification of the photographer as pop hero is undoubtedly David Bailey [...] the openly sardonic historian of his time elevating a narrow circle of his own friends and acquaintances into a chic but deliberately frivolous pantheon; hard-working but ruled by pleasure.”²⁵ Bailey’s prominence as the Pop photographer of Swinging London was due in part to his romantic relationships with models, particularly Jean Shrimpton. As such, Bailey’s role as the poster boy for the ‘photogenes,’ the wild young men primarily associated with the world of fashion magazines, models, and piles of money, serves to elucidate his own regard for the profession. Says Bailey: “I think the photographer is one of the first completely modern people [...] he’s always surrounded by beautiful girls, he travels a lot and he’s always living off his nerves in a big-time world.”²⁶ Thomas’s stature as a prominent photographer is unveiled throughout the film’s seemingly fluid narrative. Upon first introduction in the film, Thomas emerges from a doss house where he has photographed the harsh realities of its derelict, homeless inhabitants.²⁷ Initially displaying a dishevelled appearance, Thomas’s high-class status is revealed once he drives his Rolls Royce convertible towards his photography studio.

Overall, the mechanics of photography in relation to perception and practices of looking are a prominent theme in *Blowup*, both in terms of Thomas’s profession as well as the image’s larger connection to the boundaries of truth, perception and reality. Further, the relationship between image and spectacle is explored in Thomas’s encounters with an apparent murder, which he experiences through his blown-up photographs of the park. Thomas’s description of the murder as “fantastic” to Ron on the phone reinforces

both the desire of the image, and what Guy Debord calls “the society of the spectacle.” In his seminal text, *The Society of the Spectacle* (1970), Debord notes, “the entire life of societies in which modern conditions of production reign announces itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation.”²⁸ Thomas’s discovery of the murder through images further confuses his actual experience of the event, for he did not experience the murder firsthand and constructs the image of the murder through the mechanics of photography. Despite his apparent witnessing of a dead body late evening in the park, and his return to the empty space the following morning, Thomas’s interest in the murder resides in the power of the image, and the ability to construct narratives and potential meanings through the juxtaposition and magnification of images.

Swinging London iconography

References to Swinging London images and iconography are revealed in the opening credits of the film, which feature live action footage of a model, Donatella Luna,²⁹ being both objectified and photographed by a group of male photographers. In this construction, the model is positioned as an object of fascination for the male gaze and made into a spectacle and icon of Swinging London.

The introduction of the photographer as a prominent image-maker in this context foreshadows the film’s central focus on Thomas and his experiences with “the dazzle and the madness of London today.”³⁰ Similarly, the cut to the mimes, or merrymakers, for the film’s opening scene offers an interesting depiction of youthful, anarchic revelry. As a troupe, the mimes disrupt the everyday silences of London’s West End Economist

Plaza³¹, and their frenetic energy combats the expectations of the silent mime archetype. This post-structural approach to identity, in terms of constructed signs and symbols, ultimately questions the authenticity or visualization of icons and archetypes, offering a mimetic representation nonetheless. Seeking monetary donations, the mimes fill the London street with youthful spontaneity yet become somewhat antagonistic in their approach to wealthy Londoners who drive extravagant automobiles. Further, the visual treatment of class and social status signifiers is made apparent in the film's opening scenes. During the merry-makers' romp through the streets, two nuns dressed in white proceed down the sidewalk and a lone Buckingham Palace Queen's guard marches in full uniform. The placement of these emblems suggests an ultimate displacement of assumed signifiers in a particular contextual frame. For example, Thomas purchases a propeller he finds in an antique shop rather impulsively, yet the object only holds an aesthetic worth, and his personal interest, in this particular context.³² Similarly, Thomas's power is not fully apparent in the doss house; rather, his role as a photographer is only revealed when certain symbols and signs are in place, such as the flashy Rolls Royce, the hidden camera in a paper bag, and folded paper money bills. The value of symbols and images is made further apparent during the photo shoot scene between Thomas and Verushka, a prominent Swinging London model who plays an unnamed model in the film. Before he enters the studio, Verushka is without value or presence. As a model manipulated in front of the camera, she is an attractive source of power in the context of the photoshoot, yet is otherwise discarded.

Gender Relations

According to Antonioni scholar Peter Brunette, the director's social critique in *Blowup* is made primarily evident in his "exploration of gender issues that now, for the first time, focus on a principal male character rather than a female one."³³ In addition, Brunette reiterates Sam Rohdie's assertion that "the change from female to male protagonist [in Antonioni's work] is accompanied by a change from a subjective camera and narration to a rigorously objective camera and objective narrative position."³⁴ As such, *Blowup* showcases a predominantly male point of view, both from Antonioni's standpoint as a director, as well as Thomas's position as a photographer who offers an intrusive male gaze on models and other female characters. Similarly, Brunette claims that *Blowup* is concerned with "perception, specifically, artistic perception, and even more specifically, male artistic perception."³⁵ In the film, Thomas is surrounded by desiring female subjects, "birds" and models, which he disdains and rejects in order to assert his masculine power. Ultimately, he is rendered powerless by Jane (Vanessa Redgrave), whom he first encounters in the park with the man he later believes to be a murder victim. Her abrupt departure during their erotic encounter in his studio leaves him desiring her through her anonymity and absence. Overall, Thomas exercises his male power through the manipulation of the camera, evident in his commanding presence during the modelling photo shoot, and his role as image-maker pursued and desired by two aspiring models, the Blonde One (Jane Birkin) and The Brunette (Gillian Hills).³⁶ Also, in his bearing witness to the apparent murder in the park, Thomas is rendered both powerful and powerless, in that the image offers him the possibility of power, yet the

stealing of the photographic images from his studio by Jane leaves him with no evidence to prove the murder.

Further, Brunette asserts that *Blowup* marks a distinct departure for the director, in that he was now “examining the relationship between an individual and reality, rather than interpersonal relations,”³⁷ which were central to his previous films. While the exploration of reality in relation to the individual experience pervades *Blowup*'s existential interests, the interpersonal relations between male and female characters reinforce the binary oppositions that pervade the film's thematic concerns, and also reiterate issues surrounding gender relations in the context of Swinging London. With the exception of Jane, who exercises power and agency through her anonymity and absence, female characters are delegated to such roles as wife, “birds,” models, and in the case of Sarah Miles' character Patricia, a domestic (yet desiring) dolly bird. In particular, the interactions between Thomas and Jane illustrate the patriarchal regard for females in the context of post-war Britain.³⁸ Upon their first meeting in the park, Jane demands the photographs, claiming “I'll pay you,” to which Thomas replies, “I overcharge...there are other things I want on the reel.” The erotically charged banter between the two characters continues during their next meeting at Thomas's studio, during which Jane attempts to obtain the photographs. In this scene, Thomas's discussion of his wife, coupled with his patronizing treatment of the female sculpture whose head he pats lightly and on which he extinguishes his cigarette, extends his patriarchal, oppressive view. His claim that “even with beautiful girls, you look at them, and that's that [...] I'm stuck with them all day long,” further reveals his disregard for women. In addition, Jane and Thomas's attempts to seduce one another creates an additional layer of desire to the scene, with Thomas's

failed attempts to seduce Jane, coupled with the incorrect phone number she gives him, leaving him all the more dissatisfied.

Fashion

In *Blowup*, fashion is one of the only constants in the ever-changing social landscape of London. Many characters wear the same items of clothing for the duration of the film, which takes place over the course of a day and following evening. Further, fashion plays a predominant role in the construction of male and female subjectivities. Antonioni's treatment of fashion offers a visual language in which youth identity markers are both assimilated and contested as sites of signification.

In particular, the emphasis on consumption in relation to sexuality is heightened in various female characters, particularly the models and dolly birds. When The Brunette and The Blonde One visit Thomas's studio for a second time, they are treated to an assortment of dresses and eventually partake in a scandalous romp with the photographer on a purple paper backdrop.³⁹ Interestingly, the juxtaposition of blue striped mugs with The Blonde One's Pop dress enhances the role of fashion and commodities in the Pop lifestyle. While exploring the studio, The Brunette whispers to The Blonde One, "psst! look at all these clothes," upon which the two young girls frenetically look through the poster dresses. Here, the girls' overtly emphatic desire for the latest 'mod' fashions highlights the role of consumption in the assimilation of music and fashion as dominant modes of marking youth, particularly female identity in the context of Swinging London. Further, the anonymity of female identity is repeated when Thomas first inquires about The Brunette's name; "what do they call you in bed"? Her response, "I only go to bed to

sleep,” marks her more demurely innocent in comparison to The Blonde One’s more overt attraction to Thomas.

In addition, the various models, or “birds” as Thomas refers to them, reflect the burgeoning fashion industry in Swinging London. The relationship between Thomas and his models is a site of conflict; his career depends on capturing their image and promoting the clothing they wear, yet he manipulates the female models as objects in order to suit his own purposes as a photographer and image-maker. Their lack of agency and objectification is enhanced through their inability to speak, their manipulation by Thomas to position their bodies according to his instructions, for example to “close their eyes.” His reference to one model as “Stripes” draws an interesting correlation between fashion and female identity -- stripes being the pattern on her item of clothing. Further, the use of clothespins to give the illusion of form fitting clothing in fashion photography enhances the models’ disposability as throwaway objects. Ultimately, the use of models reflects the increasingly successful modelling and fashion industry in post-war Britain. However, Antonioni’s depiction of female models offers only a slight parody and grotesque exaggeration of the model archetype and Swinging London fashion, in that their treatment as static objects comments on gender relations and the industry’s particular treatment of models. Ultimately, these representations highlight fashion consumption in the construction of female youth identity.

As evident in the scene featuring Verushka’s photo session, models are an integral component of the photographer’s daily ontology, his Pop lifestyle, business, and romantic affairs. In the context of the film, Verushka’s performance reinforces her professional modelling career during the Swinging London era.⁴⁰ In the film, her appearance is

fragmented; her image is initially reflected in some plastic plexiglass against a wall in Thomas's studio, suggesting the importance of her image as a model. Her announcement of "Here I am" introduces her pent-up desire for the photographer and increasing anticipation of the photo shoot. Here, Verushka adopts two roles, that of a top model and, presumably, Thomas's lover.⁴¹ Initially, Verushka is situated in a liminal position between male and female bust sculptures in the studio, and her placement reiterates the film's exploration of gender relations as a binary construction. While she is discarded by Thomas's gaze during the photo shoot, Verushka also appears briefly in the party sequence towards the end of the film, which offers a revisiting of the London fashion scene in the film. Thomas's inquiry that she is "supposed to be in Paris" is met with her enigmatic response, "I am in Paris." Her response is in keeping with the youthful consumption of drugs, particularly marijuana in the context of the party, but it also enhances the film's interest in exploring the metaphysical boundaries of fantasy and reality.

Music

In *Blowup*, intersections between music and fashion heighten the portrayal of characters participating in youthful practices of consumption. In particular, the interactions between Jane and Thomas in his studio evoke a variety of youth consumptive practices such as drugs (smoking), music, dance, fashion, in a curious Pop interior. While the couple are conversing in the sitting area, Thomas instructs Jane to listen to a jazz record in a particular way; in doing so he introduces her to particular modes of consuming youth music and also highlights the differences between youth cultural

practices and hegemonic modes of entertainment. Thomas instructs Jane to “have a listen to this!,” upon which the non-diegetic music of Herbie Hancock’s original jazz score becomes diegetic, emanating from a revolving turntable. Jane is allowed to participate in this ritual, yet her actions are informed by Thomas’s instructions to “listen, keep still. You can smoke if you like...slowly, slowly! Against the beat.” Her interpretation of the music through erratic dance moves is ultimately tamed by Thomas’s vocal demands.

Arguably, the portrayal of youth music and fashion practices comes to fruition during The Yardbirds’ performance of “Stroll On” in the Ricky Tick discotheque. Situated beside a prominent window display featuring female mannequins and examples of Mod fashion, the Ricky Tick represents the nightclub music scene in mid 1960s Britain. Initially, Thomas encounters the club after following a woman he believes to be Jane, yet her ‘image’ vanishes in front of the “Permutit Leisure” boutique. Thomas proceeds down a back alleyway and wanders into the club, encountering The Yardbirds on stage in front of an audience of motionless youths. In keeping with The Yardbirds’ raucous⁴² performance, the Ricky Tick serves as a predominantly male-oriented space with an audience of mainly male spectators. Reconstructed images are featured on the interior door to the performance area and reference then-contemporary events and figures associated with British youth musical preferences.⁴³ According to Roland-François Lack, “the original Ricky Tick Club was in Windsor, with branches in other areas outside London [...] The relocation of this club to central London is one of the film’s manipulations of reality, though considerable effort is made to make the displacement feasible, down to producing posters for this staged event at the new location”⁴⁴ The juxtaposition of Thomas’s fluid movement through the audience comprised of the so-

called new youth aristocracy in London suggests youth culture is a nuisance to the status quo. Overall, the club is positioned as a hidden site of youthful expression, tucked away from busy London streets. As an interstitial space, then, Antonioni emphasizes the Ricky Tick as a social space that legitimates music and fashion as vehicles for the construction of youth identity.

Conclusion

As a “mod masterpiece,”⁴⁵ *Blowup* encapsulates a distinct cultural moment in post-war Britain. The film’s enigmatic tagline, “sometimes reality is the strangest fantasy of all,” lends itself to the encircling media frenzy directed towards London and youth culture during the mid 1960s. As such, *Blowup* offers an inquisitive visual representation of the city as a space in which fantasy and reality are intertwined with the power of the image in the “society of the spectacle.”⁴⁶ Reconstructing London as a cinematic space in which youth cultural activity takes precedence over the older generation and Britain’s Establishment, Antonioni suggests that binary systems of signification and order are breaking down to make way for new youth energy and activity.

Offering a social critique of youth culture and the media myth of Swinging London, the film also provides a highly stylized image of national identity in larger cultural memory. With an emphasis on the image and practices of looking, Antonioni suggests a critical stance for interpreting the media myth as well as the representation of youth culture in media forms.⁴⁷ Overall, the film’s portrayal of youth as a site of visual fascination and a new brand of consumer marks the beginning of the Swinging London

film as a vehicle for social critique, foreshadowing the satirical and critical tones of *Smashing Time* and *Performance* in the process.

Notes

¹ The thesis uses the original 1966 UK release title for the film, rather than the hyphenated *Blow-Up*, which is used on subsequent US releases for the film.

² Cortazar's original title is *Las Babas del Diablo* (literally translated as "The Droolings of the Devil"), although Peter Brunette asserts in the 2004 DVD commentary that Antonioni's film is "only very loosely based" on the short story. Nevertheless, the success of the film influenced Cortazar's career, and his 1967 collection of short stories was subsequently titled *Blow-Up and Other Short Stories*.

³ According to Peter Lev, "Wyndham's article is a long interview with three successful young photographers – Brian Duffy, Terence Donovan, and David Bailey – which describes the milieu of British fashion photography circa 1964 [...] Their professional and personal innovations included a more directly sexual approach to fashion, photography, and art photography, and a similar coming together of documentation of an event and creation of an event. The photographers observed the London scene but also helped to create it." See Lev, "Blow-up, Swinging London and the Film Generation," *Literature Film Quarterly*, 17.2 (1989), 134.

⁴ The thesis uses the names of the characters Thomas, Jane, The Blonde One, and The Brunette as noted in the original screenplay of the film. There is no mention of specific names for characters throughout the duration of the film, apart from Ron, who can perhaps be determined as representative of the older generation due to his more established position as Thomas's business partner. The aura of anonymity that pervades youth in the film ultimately enhances the characters' fluid explorations of Swinging London.

⁵ *Blowup* theatrical trailer, 1966.

⁶ 2004 DVD release, back cover description.

⁷ Robert Murphy, *Sixties British Cinema* (London: BFI Publishing), 1992: 148.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 146.

⁹ Peter Ackroyd, *London: The Biography* (London: Vintage), 2001: 760.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Michael J. Dear, *The Postmodern Urban Condition* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers), 2000: 179.

¹² *Ibid.*, 184.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 182.

¹⁴ Entitled "The Scene," *Time's* map of the Swinging London scene delineates such districts as South Kensington, Belgravia, Chelsea, and Mayfair as youth oriented consumer spaces. Boutiques such as Hung On You, Bazaar, Top Gear, and Countdown are also noted (see Appendix. fig. 2).

¹⁵ Specific locations for the film included: MGM British Studios, Borehamwood, Hertfordshire, Maryon Park, Woolwich Road, Charlton, London, England (the park), Economist Plaza, N. Ryder Street, off Piccadilly, Westminster, London (West End), Consort Road, Peckham Rye Station, southeast London, Pottery Lane, Notting Hill, London, England (photo. studio exteriors), Kings Road, Chelsea, London (restaurant), Stockwell Road, Lambeth, London (Pride and Clark). South Kensington, London.

¹⁶ Ian Buchanan, "Space in the Age of Non-Place," *Deleuze and Space*, ed. Ian Buchanan and Gregg Lambert (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 2005: 28.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁹ Martin Harrison qtd. in Hilary Radner, "On the Move: Fashion Photography and the Single Girl in the 1960s," *Fashion Cultures: Theories, Explorations and Analysis*, ed. Stella Bruzzi and Pamela Church Gibson (London: Routledge), 2000: 129.

²⁰ In his autobiography, David Hemmings claims, "originally, it was the idea of Antonioni's producer, Carlo Ponti, that he should make a film that reflected the new breed of unorthodox and independent fashion photographers like David Bailey, Terry O'Neil and Terry Donovan. However, nothing had come of it until Ponti heard that Antonioni was adapting a Julio Cortazar story about a photographer and planning to shoot it in Milan, at which point he suggested that the Maestro should set it in London. Antonioni had come to London over the winter specifically to see if the media portrayals of the city were real." See David Hemmings autobiography, *Blow-Up and Other Exaggerations* (London: Robson Books), 2004: 8-9.

²¹ So-called Swinging London, with its fashion models, music clubs, and playful parties is tempered with the images of the harsher realities of London. Thomas's freelance photography project has him visit the doss house at the beginning of the film, and show the photographs to Ron (Peter Bowles) at the café.

²² Upon reading the script for the film, Hemmings claims he didn't know "what the hell it's all about" and was primarily interested in securing "one of the most coveted film roles in Britain at the time. What made it perhaps more surprising for me was the industry whisper that Terence Stamp had already been signed for the role – a fait accompli." See Hemmings, *Blow-Up and Other Exaggerations*: 12.

²³ George Melly, *Revolt into Style: The Pop Arts* (London: Penguin Press), 1970: 161.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 160.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Shawn Levy, *Ready, Steady Go! The Smashing Rise and Giddy Fall of Swinging London* (New York: Doubleday), 2002: 27.

²⁷ In Britain, a doss house, also known as dosshouse or flophouse, is where lodgers seek temporary accommodations, often sharing bathroom facilities and residing in small living quarters. Also known as 'skid row' hotels in America.

²⁸ Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, (Detroit: Black and Red), 1970: 2.

²⁹ Donatella Luna was a prominent fashion model who worked in London during the 'Swinging' era.

³⁰ *Blowup* theatrical trailer, 1966.

³¹ London's West End Economist Plaza, a hidden courtyard housing the *Economist* magazine offices.

³² The propeller scene occurs during Thomas's visit to an antiques shop on the outskirts of the infamous park in Woolwich. Thomas's purchase of a propeller also mirrors a similar purchase made by David Bailey in the mid 1960s. The propeller is delivered to Thomas's studio, and at first he forgets his "can't live without it" regard for the object when greeting the deliveryman.

³³ Peter Brunette, *The Films of Michelangelo Antonioni*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1998: 111.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ These two characters are referred to the names as they appear in the original screenplay for the film.

³⁷ Brunette, *The Films of Michelangelo Antonioni*, 109-110.

³⁸ See Chapter 1 discussion regarding dolly birds.

³⁹ Scandalous for the appearance of female nudity, *Blowup* was one of the first major motion films to feature female pubic hair.

⁴⁰ Born Verushka von Lehndorff in East Prussia, 1939, Verushka began modeling in the mid 60s.

Interestingly, her family history adds impetus to the class myth which pervades the Swinging London era; her mother was the former Countess Gottliebe von Kalnein, and her father, Heinrich Graf von Lehndorff-Steinort was a member of the German Resistance. Her involvement in London during the mid-1960s also enhanced the increasing European stylistic influence on fashion, music, and modeling.

⁴¹ This nuance undoubtedly mirrors David Bailey's relationship with his models, most notably Jean Shrimpton in the early to mid 1960s.

⁴² "Raucous" in the sense that Jeff Beck smashes and destroys his guitar on stage towards the end of the performance, tossing the remains into the crowd.

⁴³ The images included references to Harold Wilson (featuring the phrase, "I Love Harold"), Hitler (a portrait with the word bubble, "It was either this, or a milk round"), and Bob Dylan's death ("Here Lies Bob Dylan: Passed Away Royal Albert Hall, 27 May 1966 R.I.P."). In particular, the Dylan image refers his infamous concert at the Albert Hall on May 27 1966, during which the musicians use of an electric guitar caused controversy with his dedicated folk audience, and thus his popularity incited his 'death' amongst his audience. Bob Dylan's image is also featured on a young girl's paper dress in British Pathé's *Swinging Britain* newsreel.

⁴⁴ See Roland-François Lack, "London Circa Sixty-Six: The Map of the Film." *London Eyes: Reflections in text and image*, ed. Gail Cunningham and Stephen Barber (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), 162.

⁴⁵ *Blowup* theatrical trailer, 1966.

⁴⁶ See Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*.

⁴⁷ With the eventual success of the film, "Antonioni reached a broader public with *Blow-Up* than ever before or since in his career, and the film's success led to a contract for three more English-language films with MGM (only two were ever made: *Zabriskie Point* and *The Passenger*)." See Lev, "Blow-up, Swinging London and the Film Generation," 135.

Chapter 3: Smashing Time

“First, I’ve got to get to Carnaby Street because I’ve got to be dressed right, you see. Then I’ll get a pad, and find an agent, and then I’ll become famous – TAXI!”
(*Smashing Time*, 1967).

Filmed entirely on location in London, *Smashing Time* (Desmond Davis, 1967) critiques the media construction of Swinging London through satire and parody of female youth identity, the British music and fashion industries, and the commodification of youth culture. Produced by Carlo Ponti, who also produced *Blowup*, the film features an original screenplay written by George Melly. The narrative follows two Northern English “switched-on birds,”¹ Yvonne (Lynn Redgrave) and Brenda (Rita Tushingham) who travel to London “with their hearts full of Dreams.” Yvonne is entranced with Swinging London and seeks out Carnaby Street, meeting the photographer Tom Wabe (Michael York), who exploits her image and fashion style in the press, and also pursues a romantic relationship with Brenda. In the process, the girls lose their life savings but subsequently win ten thousand pounds from a popular television show, which Yvonne promptly uses to become an instant pop star, hiring Mr. Tove (Jeremy Lloyd) as a publicity agent. Initially attracted to the Swinging London portrayed through the media, the two girls become disillusioned with their actual experiences in the scene and return to their Northern hometown.

This chapter will discuss the film in terms of its characterization of young women and the construction of female youth identity, the representation of music and fashion practices, and the film’s critique of youth discourse as a media spectacle. Further, the film’s portrayal of Carnaby Street, the Pop photographer, and the swinging dolly bird as

recognizable icons of the visual culture of Swinging London will be discussed, in addition to the film's representation of the Pop lifestyle.

London

In *Sixties British Cinema*, Robert Murphy suggests “*Smashing Time* is generally taken as marking the turn from freshness and originality in films about Swinging London to the clichéd tackiness which marked its decline.”² According to Murphy, “*Smashing Time* looks for thrills in the big city but ends up endorsing homely virtues like sincerity, loyalty, friendship.”³ The film also attempts to establish London as a distinct attraction for post-war youth, similar to other Swinging London films such as *Georgy Girl* and *The Knack*. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith elaborates: “British cinema was slow to pick up on the changes going on below the surface of popular cultural life. One thing that film-makers did twig was that London ... was once again the focus of hopes and dreams for many people.”⁴

Like *Blowup*, the film explores Swinging London discourse in order to displace its referential iconography promoted in media representations of youth culture. As Murphy suggests, “there is an attention to detail in the script, casting and art direction which is rare in British comedy”⁵ and “looking back over twenty years later, such visual exuberance seems unusual and admirable, the riot of Pop Art colour [is] a refreshingly bold addition to the adventurous but still monochrome London of *The Knack*.”⁶ The film's opening credits offer cartoon renderings of Yvonne and Brenda at such recognizable London landmarks as Buckingham Palace, Oxford Street, Carnaby Street, as well as certain scenes and events in the film. The juxtaposition of cartoon Brenda and

Yvonne on the train with the film's opening scene introduces the film as a construction, or simulated representation of the 'real.' The train journey from the North of England to central London continues the use of the trope in sixties British cinema, particularly evident in the opening sequence of The Beatles film, *A Hard Day's Night*. Further, the film's use of an elaborate mise-en-scène constructs a cinematic Swinging London that critiques youth cultural practices as well as media representations of youth culture. As the film's title song, "Smashing Time"⁷ suggests, the girls are "going down to London [...] we're going to have a smashing time." The influence of popular media is addressed in the film's opening scenes, with Brenda's perusal of *Trend* magazine on the train, and Yvonne's advice, "don't go talking to any fellows, remember that article I showed you in the Sunday papers? [...] The one about the perils that lurk on London railways stations for young girls coming down from the North with their hearts full of dreams." Her statement suggests the power of the media in relation to the notion of Swinging London, and also reflects the film's narrative and characterization. Overall, Yvonne and Brenda act as counterpoints to portray the female experience of Swinging London as both wonder and disillusionment.

In *Smashing Time*, language is just one element in a system of signs and signifiers that contributes to the construction of a distinct iconography associated with Swinging London and youth style. As Melly notes in *Revolt into Style*, "pop has been consistently prejudiced against the written word in favour of that which is spoken or sung. This is consistent [...] Pop is communal, tribal, a shared experience [with a] deliberate impoverishment of vocabulary."⁸ In the film, language is established as a crucial signifier of Swinging London youth discourse. In particular, the word "smashing" is used to

denote a variety of experiences, and at various points of the film, used as an adjective to describe something ‘hip’ and ‘gear’ with London’s trendy crowd. Yet, the exaggeration and pronunciation of certain words and phrases suggests a parody and critique of such youth language practices. As Melly suggests, “the final mark of verbal pop is its pronunciation. This is classless, in that it is used by people irrespective of their class origin, but is based on cockney, not in the old ‘gor blimey’ sense, but by its rejection, wherever possible, of all consonants.”⁹ With their prominent Northern accents, Yvonne and Brenda adopt the vernacular of Swinging London to assimilate themselves into “the switched on scene,” a gesture reflected in the title song; “we’re going to find a flat and after that/ we guarantee we get around/ we’ll get a break in London town/ We look cool though we’re excited like the ‘In Crowd’ do/ must look cool although we’re delighted/ We’re going to have a smashing time.”¹⁰

Carnaby Street

Desiring the images of Swinging London presented through the media, Yvonne is obsessed with Carnaby Street, regarding the district as a youth-oriented place that fosters a desirable “hip” scene involving fashion, music, and the latest trends. Specifically, the representation of Carnaby Street offered in the film can be determined as Yvonne’s idealization of the space; her perspective is undoubtedly influenced by her assumed reception of Swinging London media images in her Northern hometown. Surrounded by strolling consumers, potted palms, and a British red phone box, Yvonne experiences Carnaby Street as a visual spectacle. Accompanied by the song “Carnaby Street,” sung by Redgrave and Tushingam, the scene is enhanced by lyrics that address

Yvonne's idealization of the space and the cultural significance of Carnaby Street in relation to youth culture: "Carnaby Street/ Carnaby Street/ Carnaby, Carnaby, Carnaby Street/ The street that's a part of the beat at the heart of the scene/ you know my Aunt Irene/ would find it quite obscene / to me it's just a Teenager's Heaven/ Carnaby Street!"¹¹ Similarly, the second verse offers insight into the influence of youth fashion on Britain's culture industry and the construction of youth sartorial identity and subjectivity: "You'll pay for the gear on display to appear on the scene/ It's no good being mean, they'll have your every bean/ and I'll be like the Queen Of The Castle/ Carnaby Street!" However, as Murphy suggests, while "the girls might be obsessed with Carnaby Street, [...] much of the action takes place in the seedier bits of Camden Town and the film has a solid sense of geography to underpin its fantasies."¹² The juxtaposition of working-class London with the spectacular Carnaby Street is made explicit in the editing of this scene, which features cuts from Yvonne's romp through the space to Brenda's attempts to earn some money in a café back in Camden Town. Although this delineation attempts to separate the media fabrication of London from its harsher realities, Yvonne's jaunt reflects the idealization of Carnaby Street as a social space for affluent youth rather than a tourist destination. During the scene, multiple Pop photographers, mimicking Thomas's actions in *Blowup*, as well as David Bailey's, snap photographs of female models in front of Carnaby Street boutiques.

Importantly, the designation of Carnaby Street as a site of cultural production emphasizes the notion of youth culture as spectacle. Under the influence of proprietor John Stephen, the district became one of the most sought-out tourist destinations in London during the 1960s, and was regarded as a "luminous global centre of youth

fashion.”¹³ The popular regard for Stephen as “the uncrowned King of Carnaby Street”¹⁴ was due to his transformation of the district, managing upwards of fifteen boutiques in the district that were initially concerned with menswear; his first boutique, His Clothes opened in 1958, followed by Male West One, Lord John, and the first female fashion boutique Lady Jane, in 1966.¹⁵ The feminization of Carnaby Street, in terms of the shift from male to female fashions suggests the visualization of young women as a distinct consumer audience, and also the idealization of the space in popular media. As the film was shot entirely on location in London, particular references to the famous street are made evident during Yvonne’s romp, although these signifiers become exaggerated within the *mise-en-scène* of the film. For example, His Clothes is prominently displayed in one shot during the Carnaby Street sequence, as are Male West 1, Lord John, and the Carnaby Street sign. Yet, the name John Stephen only appears on the wall of the Tre Camp boutique as a symbol of Carnaby Street, reducing the “uncrowned King” to a textual reference.

Ultimately, the fascination with Carnaby Street in larger popular culture is pertinent to the film’s recognition of the fashion district as a purveyor of youth trends. As described in The Rank Organization’s *In Gear* newsreel, “a street called Carnaby attracts those tourists who delight in the relics of Britain’s past, Stonehenge, Brighton Pier, the House of Lords, although some natives are still seen, albeit heavily cloaked.”¹⁶ This reference to the cloak as a style of youth fashion echoes Brenda’s purchase of a purple cloak from Mrs. Gimble’s used clothing shop. The combination of new and old items of clothing in this context suggests the shift in sartorial styles of youth fashion during the

mid 1960s, a notion furthered in Brenda's brief involvement with Charlotte Brillig's fictional Too Much boutique towards the end of the film.

The Dolly

In *Smashing Time*, dolly discourse is offered as a dominant trope in the construction of female subjectivity. Throughout the film, there are multiple visual and textual references to female youths as either “dolly” or “dollies.” During the “It’s Always Your Fault” sequence, documentary footage captures female youth consumers perusing Carnaby Street. Within this brief montage of images, there are references to boutique window displays, one of which showcases fashion photographer John E. Green’s large format publication *Birds of Britain* (1967).¹⁷ Featuring profiles and photographs of iconic models and dolly birds, such as Pattie Boyd, Jane Birkin, Charlotte Rampling, Chrissie Shrimpton, Mary Quant, and Sandie Shaw, this text was crucial in establishing the dolly as a form of sartorial identity, and its presence in the film further heightens the importance of female fashion in Swinging London.

As protagonists, Yvonne and Brenda offer differing attitudes and temperaments in relation to female subjectivity and sartorial identity. While Brenda resists dolly discourse by adhering to more traditional and moralistic concerns, Yvonne embraces the possibilities of the dolly identity as a means to secure fame and fortune as a pop icon in “Swinging London.” Through dress and behaviour, Yvonne perpetuates media stereotypes of female youths in Swinging London, and as a character, she is a grotesque parody of the media-infused image of female fashion during the era. In the film, Yvonne’s main outfit consists of a bright red form-fitting tunic, short red and white

striped mini-skirt, oversized plastic earrings and necklace, black and white op-art plastic Mac raincoat with belt,¹⁸ and fake eyelashes. As such, Yvonne's co-opted Mod attire, her assimilation of a commodified Swinging London style, implicates an exaggerated use of mass-produced clothing in the construction of a female sartorial identity. Yet, she is transformed into a reproduced newspaper image and media spectacle by the power of photographer Tom Wabe, and her image is deconstructed in an accompanying *Evening Standard* article¹⁹ that Yvonne reads in the film: "points to notice: heels too high, hair - will this style ever come back?, skirt - the right length, but are they the right legs?" The reduction of Yvonne's image to a series of value judgements enhances both media criticism and glorification of female identity and fashion during the era. In addition, Yvonne's primary concern with "making it big" in London is coupled with giddy and frivolous behaviour, and her naïve outlook proves disastrous during her interactions with Bobby, an older gentleman at a nightclub (Ian Carmichael). In this scene, Yvonne attempts to act as a liberated dolly bird by adopting the styles and behaviours of the media archetype without any regard for the pending consequences of her actions. Only Brenda's astute awareness saves Yvonne from Bobby's advances in a hotel room, to which Yvonne still remains oblivious.

Brenda offers a much more conservative representation of female youth, and her Northern heritage and traditional perspective is emphasized through her muted clothing, such as a tattered olive jacket and simple skirt. Brenda's first introduction to Swinging London style occurs with her purchase of a mauve, velvet cloak from Mrs. Gimble's second hand clothing store on Grudge Street in Camden Town. Her ignorance of current fashion trends is evident in her first remark upon viewing the window display: "Yvonne,

them clothes, they look dreadfully old-fashioned.” Yvonne replies, “Brenda, you don’t know anything, do you? It’s dead pacy to wear secondhand clothes, you know, feather boas and all that.” Such dialogue reflects the shift from Mod clothing to a renewed interest in Victoriana, as well as vintage styles from the 1920s to 1940s. Media representations from the time period document this shift in youth fashion trends, particularly *In Gear*. Similarly, Barbara Hulanicki’s boutique Biba was influenced by the styles of previous eras, combining a sense of old Hollywood glamour from the 1940s with the muted colours of her childhood dresses from Palestine.²⁰

Hulanicki’s boutique and particular style of female youth fashion is referenced later in the film with Brenda’s involvement at the Too Much boutique. Initially, Brenda wanders into Mrs. Gimble’s second hand clothes shop searching for new clothes at Yvonne’s request. Interestingly, the used clothing proprietor, assumed to be Mrs. Gimble, references Mod culture and bizarre youth trends in relation to fashion: “them little Mods asking for animal paws.” Brenda purchases a mauve velvet cape, covered in dust, for ten shillings (“it’s fabulous!”), along with a purple nightdress. The scene’s accompanying song, “New Clothes,” emphasizes Brenda’s newfound happy disposition through the act of consumption:

I’m feeling great in my new clothes
 you must admit they’re grand
 though they’re secondhand.
 I’m up to date in my new clothes, its wonderful to have new clothes.
 It’s so nice to know you’re really trendy
 make and mendy
 and today you’ll never make the in set in a twin set
 I’m feeling grand in my new clothes
 As everyone can see, they’re the style for me.
 If you’re bold you spend your gold as I do on new clothes.²¹

Further, the reconfiguration of secondhand clothes in the film reflects new trends in post-war youth fashion during the mid 1960s. As noted in *In Gear*, “[the boutique stands] as a collation known as the antique supermarket, and antiques can mean clothes.” As such, the youth cultural interest in secondhand clothing from past generations, rather than new Mod designs, manifested itself in such boutiques as Biba, I Was Lord Kitchener’s Valet, and Granny Takes a Trip, all of which became increasingly occupied with the interpretation and reconfiguration of past designs and clothing towards the end of the decade.

The film also suggests fashion as a form of masquerade in which characters explore the limits and possibilities of their visual appearance. In particular, a moustache is used by Tom Wabe, the host of “You Can’t Help Laughing”, and also by Yvonne when she draws on Brenda’s billboard for Gauche Cosmetics. Similarly, the use of wigs complements the shifting sartorial identities of Yvonne, who wears a variety of wigs during her brief career as a pop star, as well as Wabe when he is performing his Swinging London photographer identity in public. He only reveals his authentic appearance to Brenda when the two are alone at his boathouse, confirming his identity as a pop photographer as inherently performative.

Boutique Culture

The independent boutique is also featured in *Smashing Time*, particularly with the Too Much boutique. Operated by “her ladyship,” the wealthy aristocrat Charlotte Brillig (Anna Quayle), Too Much is a satirical representation of the idealized Swinging London boutique. Brillig’s shop implements a variety of signifiers that reference Swinging

London boutique culture, Barbara Hulanicki's Biba, and youth fashion practices which suggests a pastiche of Biba's popular characteristics in terms of boutique interior décor and female fashion. As Richard Dyer suggests, pastiche deforms the style of its referent by selecting a number of traits to accentuate and exaggerate as either emphasized or extreme. These features are then concentrated by an abbreviation of the original text's characteristic traits or referents.²² Like Biba, which was first located in Abingdon Road, Kensington in 1964 and later Church Street in 1966, Too Much is located on a small side street, and not the more popular Carnaby Street fashion district. The painted windows of Brillig's boutique feature gold Art-Nouveau swirls similar to Tony Little's window designs for Biba.²³ Further references to Biba are made apparent in the cheesecloth hats featured on the hat-stands inside the shop, and the treatment of the space as a total shopping environment combining music and fashion.²⁴

As a wealthy and young aristocrat, Brillig provides a personification of the class divisions present in Britain's youth fashion industry. As the proprietor of a fashionable and trendy youth boutique, Charlotte immerses herself in the Swinging London scene not for financial reasons, but for notoriety in the new cultural movement. Ultimately, her characterization alludes to Jane Ormsby-Gore's involvement with the boutique Hung On You, located at 43 Kings Road during the Swinging London era. Owned by Michael Rainey, whom Ormsby-Gore eventually married,²⁵ the boutique implemented a name that evoked a double meaning, what *In Gear* described as "both, we sell clothes, and we love you, which is good shop-keeping in any language." Further, the phrase "too much" heightens Brenda's confusion with pop language: "why is [the boutique] called Too Much? Won't that put folk off if they think everything is too pricey?" to which Charlotte

replies “not if they’re stinking rich enough. It was meant to be a pun. You know, too much, too much, it’s an expression!” Despite her confusion, Brenda is offered a job based on Charlotte’s fascination with her curious Northern heritage: “How super - I don’t think I’ve ever met anyone with the name Brenda, before.” When Brenda is left to tend to the shop, she encounters Charlotte’s dandy friends. Until this point, the focus of the film is based around the female experience in Swinging London. However, the dandy’s acute awareness of female fashion from a male perspective references not only male fashion in the form of the dandy, but also their feminine mannerisms in terms of voice and movement suggest a satire on dandy male youths.

The Pop Photographer

In the film, Tom Wabe, “the pace setting photographer who practically invented the dolly,”²⁶ represents the Pop photographer archetype. As a maker of images, Wabe draws parallels to David Hemmings’ performance as a photographer in *Blowup*, as well as the lifestyle pursuits of David Bailey, particularly his personal relationships with models Jean Shrimpton, Sue Murray and Penelope Tree. Throughout the film, Wabe presents himself as an exploitive photographer in pursuit of personal and financial gain. His published photograph of Yvonne in *The Evening Standard* positions the “green” Northern girl as a distinct media spectacle, or “the out girl on the in street.” Although she is compensated with “five pounds for expenses,” Yvonne is manipulated in a similar manner to the exploitation of youth culture in media representations of Swinging London. Like Thomas in *Blowup*, Wabe is positioned as a solitary freelance photographer who lives on the margins or outskirts of the city. At his houseboat, Wabe reveals his authentic

image by removing his sartorial identity of fake moustache, wig, and clothing, for he too is playing a part to fit in with the Swinging London culture industries.

Similarly, Wabe speaks in Cockney rhyming slang, thought to be associated with hip Swinging London. Upon meeting Brenda at the “switched on Jabberwock Gallery in Bond Street,” he claims to be “mad about your boat, your boatrice, your face! You look a right knockout. Let’s have your name and address...” Also, he describes *The Evening Standard* photo of Yvonne as “smashing” despite its exploitative nature.²⁷ Such frivolous use of language is reflective of Melly’s discussion of pop language in relation to Swinging London discourse:

[the popocracy] have reduced their word power to a few basic and nebulous expressions. Its sense of exclusivity demands that as soon as the media have made its passwords public knowledge they must be rejected [...] It’s more the way in which this basic language is put together that counts. It’s the rhythm which acts as the signal by which one member of the pop society recognizes another.²⁸

Thus, Brenda’s outsider status as a Northerner is reinforced through her misunderstanding of Wabe’s hip, insider terminology. Once oppositional to Swinging London discourse, Brenda becomes an obligatory object of the male gaze for Wabe’s camera after the consummation of their evolving romantic relationship at his houseboat. Unable to assert her own agency, Brenda asks Wabe if “she is staying” with him, upon which he directs her to “hurry up and finish your breakfast. Gotta take a lot of snaps of you before it starts raining, haven’t I?” Although the rain is simulated with a hose and water, it emphasizes the practice of fashion photography as a manipulated construction. In particular, the “Sunshine Day” montage sequence mirrors the almost obligatory relationship between the pop photographer and his model, or muse, during the image-laden era. Overall, Brenda’s rise as a model draws parallels to the increasingly classless

attitude of the modelling industry in Sixties Britain. In a similar manner to Twiggy's construction as "the face of '66" by Deidre McSharry,²⁹ Brenda's image is featured in a newspaper article that asks, "Is this the face of the 60s? Tom Wabe, our leading fashion photographer says it is, and he should know. 'Dollies are out', says Tom." Further, Brenda becomes the face of Gauche Cosmetics, and is prominently displayed on the cover of *Queen* magazine³⁰ in a series of photographs taken by Wabe. Interestingly, the various photo shoots offer a parody of the London fashion and modelling scene; for example, Brenda poses in a designer gown amidst animal carcasses in a slaughterhouse. Further, Brenda adopts a variety of female roles and poses for Wabe's camera, particularly as a boat captain on the "Maggie Ann" and a distressed heroine, which both enhance the notion of play, performance, and masquerade that pervades the adoption of sartorial identities in the context of Swinging London.

Music and The Pop Icon

Desiring instantaneous fame, Yvonne is attracted to any profitable facet associated with the Pop industry. As Melly notes in his analysis of Swinging London,

Pop has imposed the idea of instant success based on the promotion of a personal style rather than a search for content or meaning. Most damagingly, even on its own terms, pop is in many ways an ersatz culture feeding off its own publicity and interested to an obsessive extent with its own image reflected in the looking-glass world of the mass media.³¹

Desiring to be a Pop star as her way into the swinging scene, Yvonne uses the money she wins from the "You Can't Help Laughing" television game show and seeks out the assistance of publicity agent Mr. Tove to transform her image. When asked by Brenda what she will do with the money, Yvonne exclaims, "first I've got to go to Carnaby Street

because I've got to be dressed right, you see, and then I'll get a pad, and find an agent. And then I'll become famous of course! And if I can't get rich on 10,000 pounds, I give up!" Speaking in the "switched-on" vernacular of Swinging London, Tove describes the process involved in making Yvonne a bona fide pop star: "first, we've got to buy her into the charts, right? Then, we've got to sweeten the disc jocks and manufacture the image, right? Then, we've got to sell that image, right?" Described as a "great new property to sell...a dolly," Yvonne records her first single, "I'm So Young," which solidifies her position as a pop star. As Nigel Whiteley suggests, pop music during the Swinging London era "aspired to the condition of fashion in which change was the only constant."³²

While the "I'm So Young" sequence offers an interesting portrayal of the increasing *mélange* of influences attributed to Swinging London music styles, the song also reiterates the influence of youth culture on Britain's music industry during the mid 1960s. As evident in the following lyrics, Yvonne represents the profitable aspect of youth culture in relation to the Pop industry:

I can't sing but I'm young
 Can't do a thing but I'm young.
 I'm a fool, but I'm cool, don't put me down.
 I don't read but I'm young
 I'm built for speed cause I'm young.
 I'm a fool, but I'm cool, I'm not a clown.
 Don't give a fig if you don't dig that I'm around.
 I don't walk but I'm young.
 I never talk 'cause I'm young
 I won't cry, if I die while I'm still young.³³

Yvonne's single is envisioned by Tove as "psychedelic but not 'turned-on', uh, cellos definitely, and let me see, tuba and washboard!" Thus, the integration of Indian sitar, older women providing interesting backing vocals, and members from the British rock

group Tomorrow further enhances Yvonne's introduction into the pop world. During the recording session, Yvonne's vocals are off-key at best, as she is, according to Brenda, "tone deaf, actually." However, the playback of the recording features a polished and precise delivery, enhancing the pop music industry's penchant for using production techniques. Similar to Whitehead's documentary, *Tonight Let's All Make Love in London*, particularly the chapter featuring Andrew Loog Oldham and his production of prefabricated pop singles in mid 1960s British music industry,³⁴ "I'm So Young" demonstrates the Pop single as an ephemeral, yet pervasive, cultural time capsule.

The Pop Lifestyle: The Pop Interior

Yvonne's apartment, or "new flat" features a Pop interior highly constructed through the placement of mass-produced commodities that denote both the Pop lifestyle and hip youth style associated with Swinging London. For example, her newly acquired furniture includes a woven-wicker basket lounge chair, which, according to Madeleine Marsh, "expresses the informality aspired by many young consumers during the late 1960s ... The popularity of this design is shown by its use in contemporary magazines. For many, the hanging chair reflects the humour and imagination of the 1960s."³⁵ Similarly, both the wallpaper and floor tiles mimic the mid-1960s commercialization and reproduction of Op-art design in a wide variety of media. Marsh notes that designers

had a fascination with looking at familiar objects in unfamiliar ways – making use of revolutionary materials and processes to develop new shapes and colours. This was the backdrop against which the prosaic reality of day-to-day living was revolutionized [...] The concept of lifestyle consumerism was born.³⁶

Further, Tove's description of the flat addresses the relationship between the Pop lifestyle and its embrace of the newest developments in modern technology: "underfloor heating, double glazing, air conditioned, and sound-proofed. Roof gardened, galleried, tv-ed, and muzak. It's very pacy, you've got to own up baby, it's very pacy." With the acquisition of a switched-on pad, Yvonne's integration into Swinging London is complete, and her excitement with the "turned on studio in Chelsea with me own bathroom and hi-fi" addresses Chelsea as a sought-out youth district in London, mirroring *Time's* mapping of youth energy in "The Scene" from 1966.³⁷

Conclusion

Despite their varied successes in Swinging London, both Yvonne's and Brenda's disillusionment with Swinging London climaxes during the final party sequence which takes place at the Post Office Tower revolving restaurant.³⁸ Subsequently, the girls' return to the "reality" of the city finds them traipsing in an anonymous London street dressed in their Swinging London attire. Yvonne's comment, "what the hell do we do now, then?" is met with Brenda's desire to return to their Northern home. The final song features altered lyrics to the original main theme coupled with a past tense perspective: "when we came to London, we thought we'd have a smashing time. Because we'd never been on the scene."

Melly's critical perspective in the screenplay represents youth culture and Swinging London as a media spectacle, while at the same time the film investigates the media myth through satire and parody. With humorous performances by Tushingam and Redgrave, *Smashing Time* questions the media phenomenon as a form of spectacle and

engages with the Swinging London film as a vehicle for social critique. In comparison with *Blowup* and *Performance*, *Smashing Time* offers the most compelling critical representation of the era through the subversive implications of social satire in combination with an acute visual style that encapsulates the pop aesthetic associated with the visual culture of Swinging London.

Notes

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- ¹ *Smashing Time*, TV spot, 1967.
- ² Robert Murphy, *Sixties British Cinema* (London: BFI Publishing, 1992), 145.
- ³ *Ibid.*, 146.
- ⁴ Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, *Making Waves: New Cinemas of the 1960s* (New York: Continuum, 2008), 132.
- ⁵ Murphy, *Sixties British Cinema*, 145.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, 146.
- ⁷ Performed by Lynn Redgrave and Rita Tushingham. See *Smashing Time* soundtrack.
- ⁸ George Melly, *Revolt into Style: The Pop Arts* (London: Penguin Press, 1970), 227.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, 247.
- ¹⁰ “Smashing Time,” *Smashing Time* soundtrack.
- ¹¹ “Carnaby Street,” *Smashing Time* soundtrack.
- ¹² Murphy, *Sixties British Cinema*, 146.
- ¹³ See The Rank Organization, *Look at Life: In Gear*, 1967.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁵ See Jeremy Reed, *The King of Carnaby Street: A Life of John Stephen* (London: Haus Publishing), 2010.
- ¹⁶ See The Rank Organization, *Look at Life: In Gear*, 1967.
- ¹⁷ *Birds of Britain* features Pattie Boyd, a prominent model during the Swinging London era, as well as George Harrison’s wife, on the cover with a prominent Union Jack button nose.
- ¹⁸ This pattern is reminiscent of Bridget Riley’s op art designs from the early to mid 1960s. Reproduced for the fashion industry in the form of textiles, op art patterns were diffused from its original high art origins. Said Bridget Riley of the commercialization of op art in fashion, “I’ve yet to see an Op Art fabric which is wearable. I think they’re ugly beyond belief.” Such a remark only reifies the cultural tensions between authentic and commodified forms of youth expression during the era. See Madeleine Marsh, *Millers Collecting the 1960s* (London: Octopus Publishing Group Ltd., 1999), 101.
- ¹⁹ The article appears in a parody version of *The Evening Standard* reconstructed for the purposes of the film.
- ²⁰ See Barbara Hulanicki, *From A to Biba: The Autobiography of Barbara Hulanicki* (London: V & A, 1983).
- ²¹ Performed by Rita Tushingham. See *Smashing Time* soundtrack.
- ²² See Richard Dyer, *Pastiche* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 57.
- ²³ See Hulanicki, *From A to Biba: The Autobiography of Barbara Hulanicki*, 86.
- ²⁴ Such hats are also featured in Pathé Pictorial’s *Swinging Britain* newsreel.
- ²⁵ See Marnie Fogg, *Boutique: A ‘60s Cultural Phenomenon* (London: Mitchell Beazley, 2003).
- ²⁶ A remark reiterated by Yvonne to Brenda after reading the article in *The Evening Standard*.
- ²⁷ In a similar use of the word, Brenda repeats the use of “smashing” to describe the Pop interior of Wabe’s houseboat.
- ²⁸ Melly, *Revolt into Style: The Pop Arts*, 228.
- ²⁹ See Deidre McSharry, “Twiggy – The Face of ‘66,” *The Daily Mirror*, 1966.
- ³⁰ *Queen* is a British society magazine established in 1851. The format was revamped in the early 1960s and used as a means to promote and attract The Chelsea Set.
- ³¹ Melly, *Revolt into Style: The Pop Arts*, 4.
- ³² Nigel Whiteley, “Toward a Throw-Away Culture. Consumerism, ‘Style Obsolescence’ and Cultural Theory in the 1950s and 1960s,” *Oxford Art Journal*. 10. 2 (1987), 20.
- ³³ See *Smashing Time* soundtrack..
- ³⁴ See Peter Whitehead, *Tonite Let’s All Make Love in London: A Pop Concerto*, 1967.
- ³⁵ Marsh, *Millers Collecting the 1960s*, 25.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.
- ³⁷ See Piri Halasz, “London: The Swinging City – You Can Walk Across it On the Grass,” and Appendix. fig. 2.
- ³⁸ This sequence refers to various Swinging London “stars”; characters reminiscent of the Kray Brothers, Twiggy, as well as swamis and priests suggest a cast of iconic characters crucial to the perpetuation of the Swinging London myth in media representations of the “scene.” The Post Office Tower was a prominent London landmark in the 1960s, and was featured in The Rank Organization’s *Look at Life* newsreel entitled

“Eating High.” Narrated by Tim Turner, it depicts the rotating restaurant as “one of the trends of the swinging sixties.” See The Rank Organization, *Look at Life*, “Eating High,” (1966).

Chapter 4: Performance

“This film is about madness and sanity. Fantasy and reality. Death and life. Vice and Versa.” (*Performance* trailer, 1970).

Directed by Donald Cammell and Nicolas Roeg,¹ *Performance* offers a provocative portrayal of the exhaustion of the Pop lifestyle towards the end of the decade. Filmed in 1968 but not released until 1970 due to censorship concerns, *Performance* explores the hedonistic tendencies of the Pop lifestyle in the space between rock discourse and violence, ultimately leading to a cinematic experience centred around a spectacle of excess. According to Matthias Frey, “the London that Cammell and Roeg imagine is hardly a tourist’s cartography and certainly not the blithe celebration of ‘Swinging London’ that Warner Brothers had in mind. If *Performance* is a ‘dress-up’ film which ‘makes-over’ the gangster genre, then it also ‘makes-over’ London and the ‘Swinging London’ film.”² With a cast including James Fox, Anita Pallenberg and Mick Jagger, the film’s narrative and thematic concerns reflect, in many ways, the personal lifestyles of the actors taking part in the production.

Performance counteracts the representations of Swinging London in *Blowup* and *Smashing Time* through an interrogation of concepts surrounding crisis and catastrophe. The visual treatment of the mise-en-scène, in conjunction with the editing style, reveals the potential for film to not only construct youth identity, but also to re-write history in relation to cultural memory. As well as discussing how music and fashion inform the visual treatment of the mise-en-scène, this chapter argues that the relationship between crisis and catastrophe culminates in the film’s subversive social critique in relation to cinematic representations of youth culture produced during the Swinging London era.³ By re-envisioning and essentially re-writing the notion of Swinging London, Roeg and

Cammell destabilize the prevailing popular myth of the cultural period, suggesting London is by no means “swinging” and is, in fact, in the midst of death and destruction.

Performance focuses predominantly on youth culture as an excessive and hedonistic affair, with Cammell’s portrayal of Swinging London as a cesspool of desire, instant gratification, sex, and violence emphasizing the parallels between “madness and sanity, Fantasy and reality, Death and life, Vice and Versa” promoted in the film’s tagline. Also, the film’s overarching theme concerning the crisis of representation reiterates Guy Debord’s ideas surrounding the society of the spectacle, in which representation is in and of itself a form of spectacle and attraction.⁴ The exploration of vision and representation in the film suits Cammell’s own cinematic imperatives to rewrite the cultural memory of the time period. As such, *Performance* marks a major departure from the previous films under analysis; the film does not seek the cheap thrills of Carnaby Street and nightclubs, but is more concerned with the main protagonist’s psychological retreat into interior space. What results is a film more concerned with the subversion of youth culture as a representation in cinema.

In the documentary *Performance: Influence and Controversy*, film scholar Colin MacCabe makes an integral distinction between the imperatives inherent in *Performance* and the Hollywood genre of Swinging London films. According to MacCabe, *Performance* authentically “does it; there’s two girls and a guy in a bath, talking about whether or not they should wash their hair. There’s drugs being taken completely casually without any excitement or reverence. This is a new world, and *Performance* was certainly the first British film to show us this new world [...] It’s a film of sex, drugs, rock and roll.”⁵ The first half of *Performance* focuses on Chas (James Fox), a London

gangster who becomes involved with Harry Flowers and his gang. Due to particular circumstances, Chas seeks refuge from the mob and masks his identity. While exploring his next course of action, Chas overhears Noel, a musician, discussing his interest in subletting his rented room at Powis Square, an impressive mansion home in London belonging to Turner (Mick Jagger), a reclusive rock star. Chas assumes a false identity as Johnny D, a “juggler” and claims he is a close friend of Noel’s. Chas rents the room from Pherber (Anita Pallenberg) to the dismay of the reclusive Turner who later informs Pherber, “I don’t want any invalid, washed up, cavalier artists in my basement, sir”, the last word illustrating the ambiguity of gender and androgyny that runs throughout the film. Importantly, MacCabe makes “a distinction between the first and second half of the film in terms of the acting. In the first half of the film, you get into Powis Square and things completely disintegrate [from the original script] in favour of Jagger, Pallenberg, and Fox alone in the house.”⁶ This internalization harbours an exploration of the psyche in which performance, representation and the image in relation to identity and the self come into question. Further, Turner, Pherber, and Chas’s retreats into interior space, both psychologically and at Powis Square, suggest youth culture as a hidden endeavour, separate from daily London life.

London and *Performance*

Interestingly, the reconstruction of London as a cinematic space in *Performance* proves to be a desolate underworld filled with crime, gangsters, and other seedy characters that move through the city’s interstitial spaces. Frey concurs:

Although *Performance* is not necessarily ‘based on a real story’, its basic

situation – the coexistence and social intermingling of the criminal underworld and bohemian pop stars - was a fact of life in 1960s London. The Harry Flowers gang in the film are based on a very famous gay gang of mobsters, the Kray brothers [...] who were actually part of the Chelsea set: they were ruthless ‘criminal stars’ who hung out with the rock bands (including the Rolling Stones), dandies, mods, and other beautiful people and hangers-on. David Bailey, the London fashion photographer on whom the David Hemmings character in *Blow-Up* (1966) is based, photographed the Kray brothers [for his ‘Box of Pinup’ series].⁷

Potentially, the grouping of such individuals from different backgrounds and vocations refers to the breakdown of class and social boundaries. Further, MacCabe argues that the film takes “Brian Jones of the Rolling Stones as its [primary source and] model. It is his house at 1 Courtfield Road which inspired Turner’s, it is his girlfriend, Anita Pallenberg [...] who is the principal commentator on the action and it was the man who designed Jones’ house, Christopher Gibbs, who was the designer on the film.”⁸ As such, *Performance* is not only concerned with representing Swinging London, but the film’s interest in mirrors, doubling, and perception is heightened by Jones’s particular hedonistic lifestyle in the late 1960s, and various excesses that occurred at 1 Courtfield Road, particularly the consumption of drugs.

Performance: Music and Fashion

In *Performance*, music and fashion elucidate the shifting identities and subjectivities of certain characters. In particular, the connotations of rock discourse, via Jagger’s involvement with the film, enhance the relationship between rock music, fashion, and youth culture. In “Rock, Fashion and Performativity,” Noel McLaughlin claims that

the issue in popular music performance is not clothes, but clothing in performance; popular music is about clothes and stars, clothing on bodies

performing popular music. This means that the meaning of dress will be inflected, altered, amplified or contradicted by the musical and performing conventions and associations within which they are placed.⁹

Interestingly, the film's treatment of personal style and dress reflects particular fashion trends in the context of Swinging London. In *Performance*, the shift in sartorial appearance is evident in the hippie-inspired clothing worn by Pherber and Turner, as well as the various items of dress used as a form of masquerade towards the end of the film. In her book on boutique culture, Marnie Fogg notes that towards the end of the decade,

the modernism of the early sixties soon gave way to an eclectic appropriation of the accoutrements of other cultures, and a historical revivalism, which further fuelled the desire for self-expression inherent in the burgeoning hippy movement. In Britain, [hippy culture] translated into a desire to live outside the strictures of an affluent, aspirational middle class, while still benefiting from a society in which choice was seen increasingly as a necessity for all.¹⁰

As such, the elevation of objects from the past, such as second-hand clothes, signified a new direction in fashion that was necessary for resisting the commodification of youth cultural trends in larger cultural discourse as well as sustaining an authentic form of individualism in youth cultural practices towards the end of the decade. While this shift was explored in *Smashing Time*, it does not reach its cinematic fruition until *Performance*'s powerful exploration of Powis Square as a potentially catastrophic domestic interior, alongside the personal fashion styles of Pherber, Turner, and Lucy.

In his analysis of the film, Frey explores the ways in which *Performance* offers fashion as its central metaphor, claiming the film is “a makeover movie in both halves, a film about trying on different identities.”¹¹ Importantly, the adoption of different identities informs the characterization of Pherber, Turner, and Lucy, and by interrogating Chas, both Turner and Pherber destabilize the notion of a centered and fixed youth

identity through an exploration of the spaces between reality and fantasy, music, fashion, and drugs. Overall, the film's exploration of the construction of the self, the crisis of representation, lends itself to Cammell's interrogation of the discourses pertaining to youth culture during the Swinging London era. Further, the film's varied soundtrack, featuring original music provided by composer Jack Nietzsche,¹² and tracks by Buffy Saint-Marie, Ry Cooder, Merry Clayton, The Last Poets, and "Memo From Turner," performed by Jagger/Turner, draws on the different musical influences and styles that influenced the Swinging London music scene towards the end of the decade.¹³

Mick/Turner

Primarily, Jagger's performance as Turner draws significant parallels to his role as front man for The Rolling Stones. As MacCabe suggests, "Jagger was, whether he liked it or not, the single most identifiable figure for whom sex and drugs were not just illicit pleasures but were a direct challenge to orthodox society [...] Jagger was thus not just another pop star [...] he was the very sign of transgression."¹⁴ Upon his arrival at Powis Square, Chas learns from Lorraine, the child maid, that Turner "was world famous, when I was a new babe; he was a chart buster. I fancied him, old rubber lips. He had three number ones, two number twos, and one number four ... He retired, he stays here, he's writing a book and some music. Pherber's his lover ... their love story is world famous." This remark alludes to Jagger's involvement with The Stones as well as his "world famous" relationship with pop singer Marianne Faithful during the mid to late 1960s. Perhaps more accurately, the connections between Turner and Jones are further evident here, in terms of Jones's romantic relationship with Pallenberg and his eventual

decline into isolation and death in 1969.¹⁵ Interestingly, Jagger's position as a rock star in larger cultural discourse outside of the film is enhanced through the use of iconography on the walls of Noel's bedroom. Two painted images resembling Jagger take precedence on the bedroom wall interior. One features a Pop-art inspired painting of Jagger's face in red and black design, whereas the other foreshadows an image of Jagger from an impromptu performance (complete with neon light rods) that takes place in the living room.

Arguably, Turner's reclusive nature drives him to isolation and madness. Upon meeting Chas, Turner attempts to "mess him up a little" with music, fashion, and drugs. Yet the dichotomy between Chas and Turner offers another interesting portrayal of rebellious youth culture in opposition to a member of adult, or mainstream, society. Throughout the film, Jagger appears in various states of dress and undress. While he is first shown painting designs on an interior wall of Powis Square, the bathtub scene featuring Turner, Pherber and Lucy (Michèle Breton) showcases a semi-nude Jagger whose only concern is whether or not he should wash his hair. Later, Turner is adorned in bathrobes, an Indian inspired black suit, and perhaps most striking of all, dark eye make-up. In one scene, the latter is applied to Jagger's eyes by Pallenberg, which offers a multiple layer of performance and introduces a pertinent characteristic of glam rock style.¹⁶

Anita/Pherber

Self-described as half "Mick Jagger and half Brian Jones,"¹⁷ Pallenberg's forays into modelling and acting during the 1960s were heightened by her highly public

relationship with Rolling Stones members Brian Jones and Keith Richards.¹⁸ Yet, her powerful portrayal of Pherber introduces a new female archetype to Swinging Sixties cinema; the liberated dollybird. As evident in Pherber's initial introduction to Chas, she is a woman of power in a world dominated by men, and she exudes a sense of agency enhanced by her sexuality and ultimate control over Powis Square: she manages the finances of the residence and makes decisions that affect the experiences of other characters. Upon meeting Chas, Pherber is hidden in a closet, yet emerges as an aggressive landlord who utilizes seduction as a mode of power. When Chas is surprised at the extra rental fees, Pherber tugs on a photo above Noel's bed and replies "extortionate...of course!" simulating female masturbation by stroking her fur coat in a strategic location and asking Chas, "how do you entertain?" This combination of power and sexuality enhances Pherber's dominance, and her position on the bed suggests her form as an additional icon amidst the Pop imagery that adorns Noel's walls.

Importantly, Pallenberg utilizes the naked body as a mode of address and instrument of female power in her relations with Turner and Chas. Her interest in the relationship between the body and performance helped to inform her portrayal of Pherber as well as the overall tone of the film.¹⁹ Says MacCabe, "it was Pallenberg's own excursions into the avant-garde which were, according to Cammell, the initial inspiration for much of this aspect of the film."²⁰ Throughout the film, Pherber is an image of desire with the ability to move through different modes of seduction. In particular, the bathroom scene featuring Turner, Pherber, and Lucy frolicking in a moment of communal bathing, contextualizes both youth culture and consumerism as points of reference. Littered with a melange of candles, brown sugar, milk, cigarettes, juice, salt, decanters, bath accessories,

items of clothing and so forth, the bathroom provides a space in which scandalous youth practices are hidden, yet explored. In addition, an Eastern influence, evident in the droning sitar music, hippie clothing, and interior decorations, reiterates what Fogg notes as a distinct shift in youth trends towards the end of the era; during this time, “Tibetan prayer shawls, the beads and feathers of the Native American Indian, [were] all were worn in a narcissistic display of identification with the different, the marginal, the dramatic”.²¹ Further, Lucy mentions an altercation between herself and British officials about her French status, during which she was branded a “juvenile in moral danger” and “not desirable.” Here, Lucy’s androgyny is heightened through her unabashed nudity in the bathtub, and her “not desirable” status involves a double entendre. Fogg argues, “to the generally felt revulsion of society, the sexes looked almost indistinguishable as the counterculture pushed the boundaries of gender roles to their limit. The silhouettes of men and women became almost identical as garments, patterns, textures, and colours were worn [despite] gender or sexual orientation.”²² As such, Breton’s performance as Lucy propels the androgynous female as a potential form of female identity in both Swinging London cinema and larger popular culture. In many ways, Breton’s performance of Lucy is more liberated than Pallenberg’s, in that Pherber’s sexuality remains within the space of seduction, whereas Lucy’s nudity presents the youthful, androgynous female form as brash spectacle.

Chas

As the only character to appear in both halves of the film, Chas appears divorced from the raucous youth proceedings of Swinging London, retaining a mature status as a

gangster in the seedy underworld of the city. As Jimmy D, his pseudonym at Powis Square, he transforms his physical appearance by colouring his hair with red paint and pretends to be a “juggler” who is an old friend of Noels. After meeting with Pherber and Turner, Chas justifies his initial change in appearance, returning to his natural hair colour as he “was just having a laugh you see, with my act, with my image.” His physical appearance is transformed for the purposes of his passport Polaroid photo, and he wears a fake moustache, bowler hat and suit, which recreate his persona as a respectable working man, and not a gangster.

Iconography and The Pop Lifestyle

By focusing on youth practices, *Performance* captures multiple experiences that converge in the Pop lifestyle, a new mode of youth expression and consumption also explored in *Blow-Up* and *Smashing Time*. As MacCabe asserts,

the 60s were, in general, the decade in which representation came under attack. Happenings and situations, the breaking down of the divide between actor and audience; this was the currency of the era. *Performance* gathers up these themes - aesthetic, political, philosophical, sexual - which still dominate our intellectual and emotional lives.²³

In relation to the concept of lifestyle, both representation and image play significant roles in shaping the metaphysical and intertextual concerns of the film. Further, the role of consumption in the context of Swinging London illustrates Robert Goldman’s assertion that “lifestyle has come to refer to experiences defined by consumption of aesthetically coded sets of commodified appearances”²⁴ and furthermore, that, in consumer and popular culture, “the world of experience is embodied in the form of the commodity.”²⁵ As such, *Performance* incorporates multiple references to music, fashion, art, literature,

and popular culture; references to the Argentinean author Jorge Luis Borges, Antonin Artaud, blues musician Robert Johnson, and The Rolling Stones are evident in various scenes throughout the film. In particular, the prevalence of recognizable iconography helps to reinforce the image-mirrors-identity trope that informs the narrative and plot, as well as the film's inherent popular cultural connections to the Swinging London era, in which the media and the mediated image were paramount.

Powis Square: The Ultimate Pop Interior

Situated between decadence and decay, 81 Powis Square harbours a nightmare vision in an elaborate architectural structure. Home to Turner and Pherber, the house offers an externalization of Turner's inner madness, as well as the suggestion of retreating into interior space as a potential solution for a youth culture in a state of crisis. It offers a multitude of spaces in which characters, notably Chas, Turner, and Pherber explore the boundaries of subjectivity. Utilizing objects from the past and present in an elaborate mise-en-scène, Powis Square combines elements of youth discourse in the treatment of its interior space. Similar to the boutiques of Swinging London,²⁶ Powis Square provides refuge for wayward youth interested in exploring different possibilities and modes of experience. Ultimately, Powis Square stands as the ultimate Pop interior in comparison to *Blowup* and *Smashing Time*, in that the domestic space visualizes the decline and decay of youth culture and Swinging London.

While Powis Square can be interpreted as a symbol of this decline, the film offers a visualization of the Pop interior in varying ways from *Blowup* and *Smashing Time*, for there is a crucial relationship between domestic space and the transformation of each

character. For one, Noel's bedroom serves to accommodate Chas's exploration of identity while he resides at Powis Square. A musician and friend of Turner, Noel is initially introduced to the narrative when Chas overhears him discussing the rent of his room with an older woman. In this scene, Noel's guitar case is covered with iconography pertaining to Swinging London; the female icon for the London underground youth newspaper *The International Times* is displayed prominently amidst other female images. Further, the walls are adorned with resonant images from rock discourse, as well as European and American popular culture. These include one of Jagger, a Peter Max Pop-inspired portrait of artist Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, and a black and white photograph image of James Dean. The connection between Chas's assumed persona as "Jimmy D" and James Dean is interesting, in that it further reinstates the notion of performance and celebrity culture that pervades the film.

In particular, Turner and Pherber's bedroom frames the film's playful *ménage-à-trois* between Pherber, Turner, and Lucy. Although Pherber is Turner's girlfriend, her sexual dalliances with Lucy and Chas emphasize new modes of counterculture sexuality. The bedroom scene introduces Pherber in a more overtly sexual light, but also propels the hedonistic tendencies of the narrative forward. Also, the bedroom interior is heavily adorned with Eastern embroideries and designs, both integral components to hippy style, which was itself a composite of styles, philosophies, and modes of consumption.²⁷ Interestingly, the performative nature of the scene is introduced by Pherber who sings to herself while filming her reflection in the bathroom mirror, "one for the money, two for the show, three to get ready, 'cuz here we go." Similarly, Pherber's use of a handheld 16mm camera showcases her control over the process of representation, and also prepares

for the ensuing scene as a highly stylized performance. The layering of images and modes of representation is also apparent in this scene, as Pherber records herself, Turner, and Lucy, constructing an image that is both reality and artifice. In addition, Pherber looks into a mirror before joining in the romp, and the use of a reflective surface here suggests a questioning of representation and reflection, mirroring film's capacity to construct false images. This retreat into the interior space of the bedroom, as well as the framed bed, enhances the localization of youth cultural practices within domestic, hidden spaces. In Powis Square, youth culture has retreated from the media glare of the city, and seeks refuge within the confines of the home, which, by the end of the film mirrors the decadence of its inhabitants.²⁸ Further, the apparent death of Turner at the end of the film reiterates Cammell's fascination with the crisis in representation, as well as offering a liminal finality to the disastrous proceedings of Powis Square and the Swinging London era. Here, Turner and Chas merge identities through masquerade and clothing, and the camera reveals Chas as Turner when Harry Flowers's car drives away, providing an image that further supports the film's concerns with perception, reality, and fantasy.

Conclusion

Produced at the nexus of cultural crisis and catastrophe in Europe during 1968, a year that saw violent student protests in Paris and an escalation of youth opposition to the Vietnam War, *Performance* offers a multitude of cultural references and layers by which to interpret its sordid proceedings. Cammell's scrupulous, yet severe, vision both perpetuates and critiques the media myth of Swinging London, and cinematic representations of youth culture in post-war Britain. Although *Performance* is a media

commodity produced within the economic system of capitalism, its images of refuse and disorder offer a renegotiation of the conventions of filmmaking in the context of Swinging London cinema. Not only does Cammell counteract prevailing representations of youth in 1960s British cinema, his directorial nuances critique the very lifestyle and behaviour that *Performance* seems to advocate. Thus, the film showcases both the style and a stylization of a particular youth experience during the Swinging London era. The film's portrayal of a hedonistic lifestyle based on consumption is both glamorized and fetishized, demonstrating an unpacking of the dimensions of verisimilitude in 1960s British cinema. Ultimately, the combination of hedonistic sex, violence, drugs, music, and fashion in *Performance* suggests an exhaustion of the Pop lifestyle that Paul Schrader attributes to Cammell and Roeg:

The madness that infected Cammell and Roeg, their belief in magic, their notions of visual images as language, their Blakean conviction that the road to excess - in sex, violence, drugs, you name it- leads to the palace of wisdom, cohered in a way that defies explanation.²⁹

Nevertheless, *Performance* provides a space in which Cammell posits a larger argument about representations of youth culture. Similar to *Blowup* and *Smashing Time*, *Performance* explores the potential for film to construct authentic images of youth culture identity. Yet, Cammell is more overt in his critique of cinematic reconstructions of Swinging London, and his preoccupation with hedonism, spectacle, and excess. *Performance* positions youth culture as a further extension of spectacle. By using images as a form of visual language and cultural currency, Cammell constructs a powerful, yet displaced narrative that disrupts mediated representations of so-called Swinging London.

Notes

¹ In terms of directing, the film is usually credited to both Cammell and Roeg. However, the film is usually regarded as Cammell's vision in scholarly writing and criticism regarding the film.

² Matthias Frey, "London à la mod: Fashion, Genre, and Historical Space in *Performance*," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, 23 (2006), 373.

³ The end of the 1960s found youth culture in a strategic position: the imagery associated with the May 1968 student revolts in Paris and growing opposition to the war in Vietnam in Britain represented youth in a state of crisis. It is my aim to determine whether this sense of disillusion and need for escape is recycled in the particular style of *mise-en-scène* offered in *Performance*.

⁴ Debord's concept of the society of the spectacle is pertinent to youth and cultural upheavals in France as well as the work of the Situationists during May of 1968, to which Debord was involved.

⁵ Colin MacCabe qtd. in "*Performance: Influence and Controversy*," *Performance*, Warner Home Video, 2007.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Frey, "London à la mod: Fashion, Genre, and Historical Space in *Performance*," 372.

⁸ MacCabe qtd. in "*Performance: Influence and Controversy*," 2007.

⁹ Noel McLaughlin, "Rock, Fashion and Performativity," *Fashion Cultures: Theories, Explorations and Analysis*, ed. Stella Bruzzi and Pamela Church Gibson (London: Routledge, 2000), 271.

¹⁰ Marnie Fogg, *Boutique: A '60s Cultural Phenomenon* (London: Mitchell Beazley, 2003), 115.

¹¹ Frey, "London à la mod: Fashion, Genre, and Historical Space in *Performance*," 370.

¹² Nietzsche provided a Moog-synthesizer score for the film, one of the first of its kind.

¹³ This shift in youth music trends is evident throughout the three films under analysis in the thesis project; from jazz stylings of Herbie Hancock and the rhythm and blues inspired sound of The Yardbirds in *Blowup*, to *Smashing Time*'s satirical commentary on the Swinging London sound.

¹⁴ Colin MacCabe, *Performance*, (London: BFI Publishing, 1998), 37.

¹⁵ Jones left The Rolling Stones in 1969, and died of an apparent drowning at his home on Cotchford Farm on 3 July 1969. See Andrew Loog Oldham, *Stoned: A Memoir of London in the 1960s*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000).

¹⁶ Glam rock surpassed psychedelic and progressive rock in the early 1970s. Fashion accoutrements such as sequined costumes and dramatic make-up were integral components to glam rock style. See Philip Auslander, *Performing Glam Rock: Gender and Theatricality in Popular Music* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2006).

¹⁷ Pallenberg qtd. in "*Performance: Influence and Controversy*," *Performance*, Warner Home Video, 2007.

¹⁸ Notably, Pallenberg also starred in the cult 1960s films *Barbarella* (Roger Vadim 1968) and *Candy* (Christian Marquand, 1968).

¹⁹ Undoubtedly, Pallenberg's interest in performance and the body was influenced by her modelling career and experiences with Julian Beck and Judith Malina's performing troupe The Living Theatre. See Colin MacCabe, *Performance*, (London: BFI Publishing, 1998).

²⁰ MacCabe, *Performance*, 53.

²¹ Fogg, *Boutique: A '60s Cultural Phenomenon*, 176.

²² Ibid., 176.

²³ MacCabe, *Performance* 53.

²⁴ Robert Goldman, *Reading Ads Socially* (London and New York: Routledge), 1992, 30.

²⁵ Ibid., 25.

²⁶ Boutiques combined music and fashion practices to create an environment in which youth identity could be constructed through consumption. See Chapter 1.

²⁷ The shift from Mod inspired dress to hippie clothing occurred towards the middle of the decade. As explored in *Smashing Time*, this interest in revitalizing secondhand clothes for new purposes became a new trend in youth fashion. In particular, hippie style was the style de rigueur for youths who congregated in Haight Ashbury, and aimed to live in a sustainable, post-scarcity society, in which items of refuse were appropriated for alternate purposes, such as fashion. See Fogg, *Boutique: A '60s Cultural Phenomenon*, 2003.

²⁸ Interestingly, the only scene in which a character ventures outside of Powis Square's dark interior during the second half of the film occurs when Pherber selects some mushrooms from the back garden. This

moment offers some light on the otherwise omnipresent dark tone of the film. Also, the accompanying guitar music offers insight into the musical approach The Stones were exploring towards the end of the decade.

²⁹ Paul Schrader, "Canonical Pick: *Performance*," *Film Comment* (March/April 2007), 75.

Conclusion

As examples of a distinct brand of mass entertainment based around “a fleeting moment of mythmaking,”¹ *Blowup*, *Smashing Time*, and *Performance* document the throwaway and disposable affectations associated with post-war youth culture.² Comparing each film with research material from the era, the thesis establishes these examples of 1960s British cinema as combining various elements of the “pop arts,”³ such as music, fashion, and popular culture, and further identifies cinema as the primary medium in which the Swinging London era was documented for posterity.

Chronologically, these films signify the evolution, commodification and dissolution of the cultural era in their representations of Swinging London and construction of London as a cinematic space. In addition, the characteristics of the Pop lifestyle are explored in the films’ use of music, fashion, and the visual treatment of domestic interior space. While they critique the media conceptualization of Swinging London, attempting to portray the cultural life associated with the time period, they also perpetuate the myth through their visual treatment of the era. The selection of these particular films for the thesis was based in part on the range of representations through which they posit varying social critiques of the media myth. Using fashion as a distinctly visual and cultural fabric, each film also explores youth identity with a sartorial understanding of identity, in which participants utilize consumption as a key method in the exploration, and perhaps dislocation, of the fashioned body. Ultimately, the representation of signs, symbols, and iconography associated with Swinging London, and music and fashion as modes of performance, strengthens the relationship between the

film's representations of youth culture, the larger social context surrounding the production of each film, and the visual culture associated with Swinging London.

While not the first Swinging London film,⁴ *Blowup* has become closely associated with the cultural memory of youth culture in 1960s Britain: the viewer encounters Swinging London through Thomas's perspective and his regard for London as a system of signs and recognizable referents, despite Antonioni's use of less recognizable spaces set apart from Swinging London tourist destinations.⁵ With this film, Antonioni suggests a highly stylized social critique of the time period by constructing London as an interstitial social space situated between the bounds of reality and fantasy. Much like the media myth of Swinging London, *Blowup* engages with many of the familiar signs and symbols associated with the media spectacle in order to counter their assumed meanings in the larger cultural sphere, in a sense reclaiming symbols relating to fashion, music performance, and the consumption of drugs for their use in youth cultural practices.

Similarly, *Smashing Time* offers a stylized vision of Swinging London from a satirical perspective influenced by George Melly's original screenplay for the film. Combining traditional elements of cinema, such as humour and farce, Yvonne and Brenda "behave almost as a female Laurel and Hardy team"⁶ amidst the seemingly trendy landscape of Swinging London. Yet, *Smashing Time* strategically counters the prevailing myth of the time period through an elaborate Pop inspired mise-en-scène that glorifies the era through elements of parody. Indeed, *Smashing Time* reflects the media glamorization of Swinging London and youth culture, and in so doing, provides an engaging and humorous social critique of the era set apart from the dark undertones explored in *Blowup* and *Performance*.

In *Performance*, youth culture is positioned in a state of crisis and as a spectacle of excess, and the film showcases the destructive potential of the Pop lifestyle. As the ultimate Pop interior, Powis Square opposes the parody of Swinging London style offered in *Smashing Time* by representing the excess of decadence and decay as a means to dislocate the prevailing media notion of Swinging London as an idealized, utopian youth space. Similar to *Blowup*, *Performance* stands as a prime example of auteur cinema and offers violent and disturbing portraits of life in “swinging sixties” London.⁷ Similarly, Turner and Pherber’s roles as photographer-observers explore the boundaries of perception and representation involved in such image-making processes as photography, film, and performance, and prove the image as paramount to the construction of identity during the Swinging London era.

These three films provide a distinct lexicon that corresponds with the visual culture of Swinging London, insofar as they appropriate popular images associated with the era and utilize them as the basis for social critique. Further, these examples of 1960s British cinema destabilize the supposed Swinging London film genre in their suggestion of film as a medium for social criticism and not as an escapist form of popular entertainment. In addition, each film suggests that a critical view of Swinging London is best achieved from an outsider perspective; Antonioni’s position as an Italian director for *Blowup*, the Northern heritage of Yvonne and Brenda in *Smashing Time*, and Pherber and Lucy’s European inflections in *Performance*. Incorporating the perspectives of these outsiders, these films illustrate the ways in which 1960s contemporary cinema formed an important and complex relationship with London; this cultural axis between the city and film medium embraces the regard for cultural texts as reflective of cinema’s function and

purpose “to record its object for posterity.”⁸ In addition, the representation of such youth practices as music performance and fashion in *Blowup* and *Smashing Time* suggests nightclubs and independent boutiques and additional sites of consumerism as period confections and examples of late 1960s antiquarianism. Ultimately, these films work in a visual dialectic with one another, in that their approaches to critiquing Swinging London as a media myth imply familiar signs and symbols that they place in narrative contexts that make them seem uncanny and defamiliarized.

Further, the three films share the following character and narrative tropes; the Pop photographer, the dolly, the visual treatment of music performance and fashion; the representation of the Pop lifestyle and the Pop interior, and the appropriation of signs and symbols associated with the visual culture of Swinging London. In doing so, these films influence our social imagination of the era and reaffirm how cultural discourses such as cinema are established to redefine representations of nostalgia in cultural memory.

While the media spectacle surrounding Swinging London defined the city as a space in which new cultural attitudes and lifestyles were consumed, explored, and commodified, the exercise proved temporary; for one, changing youth trends and the widening interest in San Francisco as a more classless⁹ and widely accessible cultural (and media) Mecca, increased as the Haight Ashbury district of San Francisco experienced a newfound popularity amongst youth. Comparatively, the commodification of Swinging London in larger popular culture presented a more fluid, and quickly accessible form of personal style to be consumed through music and fashion commodities. In contrast, the cultural appeal of Haight Ashbury resided in its specific geographical location and the active participation of its inhabitants, more so in terms of

consuming drugs, experimenting with spiritual endeavours, and rejecting the cultural products of a capitalist economy, than with the consumption of commodified forms of music and fashion. However, the representation of American youth culture in cinema would benefit from a larger discussion in a larger project, using Richard Rush's *Psych-Out* (1967) and Roger Corman's *The Trip* (1967) as prime examples of disposable cinema from an American adult perspective. In addition, the analysis of The Monkees' *Head* (Bob Rafelson 1968) and *Easy Rider* (Dennis Hopper 1969) would help to establish the development of a new form of American youth cinema, in which young filmmakers reclaimed the dominant cinema apparatus as a means to express counterculture ideologies towards the end of the decade.¹⁰

Further research for this area of study would focus more specifically on the intersections of class in relation to the fashion and popular music culture industries in Britain. Much of the production surrounding fashion styles in the context of Swinging London came from participants with an upper-class social standing, whereas the burgeoning music scene attracted those with working-class backgrounds¹¹ Overall, the thesis serves as an academic and critical mode of inquiry into the image making power of cinema as a form of cultural documentation and social critique during the Swinging London era. This area of research would benefit from a larger, and more extensive, analysis of the cultural era in a future PhD dissertation.

Notes

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- ¹ Simon Rycroft, "The Geographies of Swinging London," *Journal of Historical Geography*, 28.4 (2002), 571.
- ² According to Elizabeth-Marie Tucson, "It took a decade for these throwaway values [started in the 1950s] to be completely absorbed into British popular culture. Issues in film sometimes appear later than in fine art, or visa versa, because of slippage. This is because cultural elements drawn on by the designer, or artist, have to be assimilated into popular culture before they have resonance with an audience." See Elizabeth-Marie Tucson, "Consumerism, the Swinging Sixties, and Assheton Gorton," *Journal of British Cinema & Television*. 2. 1 (May 2005): 101.
- ³ See George Melly's discussion of the pop arts in *Revolt into Style: The Pop Arts* (London: Penguin Press, 1970).
- ⁴ Many discussions of cinema from the era refer to films such as *Georgy Girl* or *The Knack...and How to Get It* as early examples of Swinging London films. See Chapter 1.
- ⁵ Antonioni's mapping of London has subsequently elevated these unknown spaces and places as recognizable sites related to the film. See Roland-François Lack, "London circa sixty-six: the map of the film," in *London Eyes: Reflections in Text and Image*. ed. Gail Cunningham and Stephen Barber (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007).
- ⁶ Robin Bean, "Smashing Time," *Films and Filming* 14/5 (February 1968): 21.
- ⁷ See Hugo Frey, "Shutting out the city: Reflections on the portrayal of London in 1960s auteur cinema," in *London Eyes: Reflections in Text and Image*. ed. Gail Cunningham and Stephen Barber, 137.
- ⁸ Lack, "London circa sixty-six: the map of the film," 156.
- ⁹ While different from Swinging London, the Haight Ashbury scene and district housed thousands of upper, middle, working, and lower class youths during its brief existence as the latest youth Mecca during the mid to late 1960s. Its accessibility was due, in part, to changing youth fashion trends (in which hippie style, a combination of thrift store finds with Native American and Eastern inspired clothing, became de rigeur for both males and females), as well as location in North America (the location attracted disparate youths from the United States, Canada, and to a lesser extent, Europe). The district also spawned a variety of musical acts (The Grateful Dead, Jefferson Airplane), responsible for what would become known as the Fillmore, or Haight Ashbury sound.
- ¹⁰ *Psych-Out*, *Head*, and *Easy Rider* would be selected for this area of research, as each film is connected in terms of production, direction, and acting: Jack Nicholson stars in *Psych-Out* as Stoney, makes a cameo appearance in *Head* as an unnamed movie director, and in *Easy Rider* as George Hanson. Further, Bob Rafelson directed *Head*, and also helped to produce *Easy Rider* (uncredited). See Peter Biskind, *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls: How the Sex-Drugs-and-Rock-'n'-Roll Generation Saved Hollywood* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1998).
- ¹¹ The Beatles, Brian Epstein, and Andrew Loog Oldham are examples of powerful industry figures involved in the Swinging London scene and cultural industries who originally came from working-class origins.

Appendix

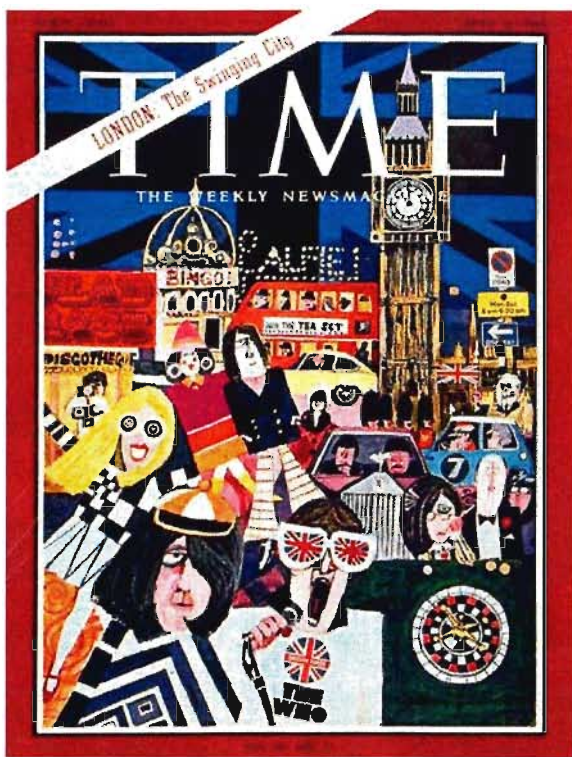
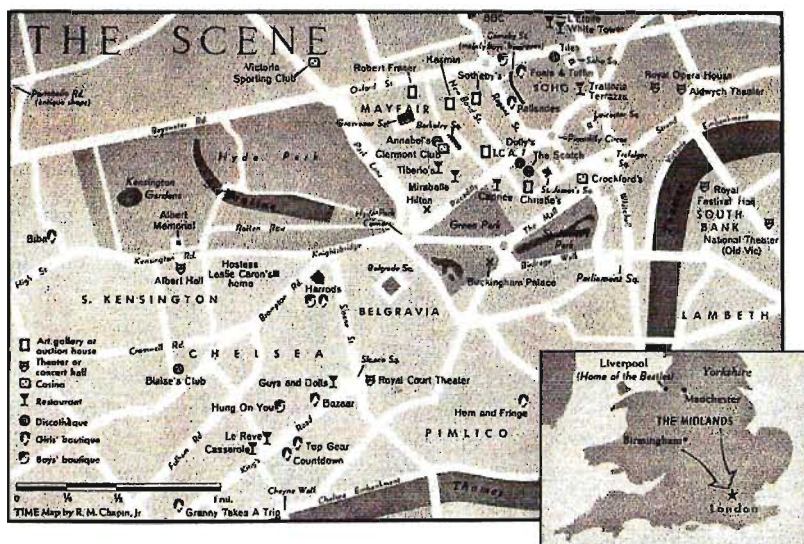


fig. 1. *Time*, “London – The Swinging City,” 15 April 1966.



Above 'The Scene', map, *Time* magazine, 15 April 1966, p.41a. *Time* Magazine © 2005 Time Inc. Reprinted by permission.

fig. 2. *Time*, “The Scene” from “London – The Swinging City,” 15 April 1966.

Filmography

The Filmography includes only the main films referenced in the thesis.

Blowup. Directed by Michelangelo Antonioni. Produced by Carlo Ponti and Pierre Rouve. Written by Michelangelo Antonioni, Tonino Guerra, Edward Bond. Cinematography by Carlo Di Palma. Original Music by Herbie Hancock. With David Hemmings, Vanessa Redgrave, Sarah Miles, Peter Bowles, Jane Birkin. United Kingdom: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), 1966.

In Gear. The Rank Organization. *Look at Life*. Britain, 1967.

Performance. Directed by Donald Cammell and Nicolas Roeg. Produced by David Cammell and Sanford Lieberson. Written by Donald Cammell. Cinematography by Nicolas Roeg. Original Music by Jack Nitzsche. With Michèle Breton, James Fox, Mick Jagger, Anita Pallenberg. United Kingdom: Warner Brothers, 1970.

Smashing Time. Directed by Desmond Davis. Produced by Roy Millichip, Carlo Ponti, Selig J. Seligman. Written by George Melly. Cinematography by Manny Wynn. Original Music by John Addison and Victor Smith. With Lynn Redgrave, Rita Tushingham, Michael York, Anna Quayle. United Kingdom: Paramount British Pictures, 1967.

Swinging Britain. *British Pathé*. Britain, 31 August 1967.

Tonite Let's All Make Love in London: A Pop Concerto for Film. Directed by Peter Whitehead. Produced by Peter Whitehead. Cinematography by Peter Whitehead. With Mick Jagger, Julie Christie, David Hockney, Michael Caine, Alan Aldridge. United Kingdom: Lorrimer Films Ltd., 1967.

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