IN FOCUS: David Bowie On-Screen

David Bowie On-Screen

by Toija Cinque, Angela Ndalianis, and Sean Redmond, editors

Not Here. David Bowie has always been a significant figure of the screen. Through appearing in experimental music videos, tense television interviews, controversial live performances, biographical documentaries, and auteur and genre films, he was a seminal, shimmering part of screen culture for more than forty years. His first television appearance was on the BBC's *Tonight* program, in 1964, where he was interviewed about his newly founded Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Long-Haired Men. At this stage, when he was still called David Jones, we are introduced to not only his hunger for publicity but also his closeness to difference, of not quite fitting in. David Bowie is, of course, not a single or singular star image: he has appeared as David Bowie and in and through various high-voltage, liminal, gender-bending personae, including Aladdin Sane (1971); he has appeared in self-reflexive cameo roles in such films as *Zoolander* (Ben Stiller, 2001); and he has taken on various serious acting roles, including the outcast poet-musician Baal in *Baal* (Alan Clarke, BBC, 1982), the vampire John Blaylock in *The Hunger* (Tony Scott, 1983), the murderous Pontius Pilate in *The Last Temptation of Christ* (Martin Scorsese, 1988), and the enigmatic inventor Nikola Tesla in *The Prestige* (Christopher Nolan, 2006). Across the body of David Bowie's screen work, one finds a great diversity in the type of roles he has taken on and the performances he has given, even if they are, nonetheless, all loosely bound by a profound alterity—a signification of difference.

David Bowie is a significant screen figure even when he is not on camera, with numerous performers, artists, and film and television texts drawing on his imagery and titular iconography to shape their texts. This is most famously the case in Todd Haynes's *Velvet Goldmine* (1998), ostensibly a Bowie biopic that Bowie famously disapproved of,

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refusing to grant Haynes the rights to his music.[1] While Bowie is not in *Velvet Goldmine*, he is nonetheless presented there as Brian Slade (Jonathan Rhys Meyers), with events and relationships culled from Bowie's own biography. Bowie's songs are often used to score a film scene or as the backing soundtrack, to historicize and affectively shape the mood and feeling of the world being brought into view. Bowie's music, his voice, his fantastic embodiment enchant the screen worlds his soundscapes are used for. In *Guardians of the Galaxy* (James Gunn, 2014), for example, "Moonage Daydream" plays as the rebel crew of the spaceship *Milano* enters the spectacular galactic corpse-planet Knowhere. David Bowie's voice and the psychedelic imagery found in the song lyrics bring his alien messiah identity into the spectacular vistas on display.[2]

Since his death in January 2016, David Bowie has appeared on the screen in a different and particularly moving way as a type of fan wish fulfillment and cultural haunting. For example, in the *Doctor Who* episode "Smile" (BBC, 2017), the Doctor faces an army of robots who are programmed to incinerate people if they detect that they are not happy. Retreating while smiling, the Doctor calls out, "I'm happy, hope you're happy too," linking the scene to the lyrics of the song *Ashes to Ashes* (1980). Peter Capaldi's Doctor was also initially modeled on the Bowie star image, the Thin White Duke, and so Bowie is constantly rematerialized in the body of this alien time traveler who has the ability to resurrect or rejuvenate.[3] Even in his death, then, Bowie lives on in screen culture. And in living on so strongly, if in part as apparition, he perhaps points to the material thinness of how our cultural world is held together:

> Spectrality does not involve the conviction that ghosts exist or that the past (and maybe even the future they offer to prophesy) is still very much alive and at work, within the living present: all it says, if it can be thought to speak, is that the living present is scarcely as self-sufficient as it claims to be, that we would do well not to count on its density and solidity, which might under exceptional circumstances betray us.[4]

The most powerful example of David Bowie haunting a text comes with the latest series of *Twin Peaks* (Lynch, Showtime, 2017). Numerous interviews with key players involved with the series suggest that if not for his illness at the time of production, Bowie would again have taken on the role of Agent Jeffries as originally scheduled.[5] The reporting of such facts stems from a longing to see him return, a nostalgia for

1 Joanna Robinson, "*Carol* Director Todd Haynes on How David Bowie's Experimental Identity Influenced His Life's Work," *Vanity Fair*, January 11, 2016, https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2016/01/david-bowie-todd-haynes-velvet-goldmine.

2 It is reported that James Gunn had wanted David Bowie to take a cameo in *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2* (2017), but Bowie died before production had begun. Corey Chichizola, "Who David Bowie Would Have Played in *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2*," *CinemaBlend*, August 2017, http://www.cinemablend.com/news/1688839/who-david-bowie-would-have-played-in-guardians-of-the-galaxy-vol-2.

3 David Renshaw, "Peter Capaldi 'Bases Doctor Who Look on David Bowie,'" *NME*, June 30, 2014, http://www.nme.com/news/tv/peter-capaldi-bases-doctor-who-look-on-david-bowie-874668.

4 Fredric Jameson, "Marx's Purloined Letter," in *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida's "Specters of Marx,"* ed. Michael Sprinker (London: Verso, 1999), 26–67.

5 Alexandra Ekstein-Kon, "David Bowie's Agent Jeffries Was Going to Be in Season 3 of *Twin Peaks*," *Movie Pilot*, April 5, 2017, https://moviepilot.com/posts/3912307.

what was once brilliantly there, and an allusive way to *presence* him into the series. This hauntology has been compounded by "readings" of the series by committed *Twin Peaks* and Bowie fans who have mined clues to suggest that Bowie, Lazarus-like, might return:

> In one scene towards the end of the second episode, Bob Cooper believes he's talking to Jeffries, although his voice is distinctly different from the Southern accent Bowie used in *Fire Walk with Me*. In another scene, in Episode 4, Cooper tells Gordon Cole (Lynch) that he's been working with Jeffries, and, shortly thereafter, Albert (Miguel Ferrer) tells Cooper that he, too, has been in contact with Jeffries.[6]

Return or remain he has, the light of his existence flickering through his fans' longing to see him living on, even if it is only on the screen. David Lynch finally included Bowie's character Agent Jeffries in a dream sequence, in episode 14, "The Return, Part 14," using footage of him shot for *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* (1992).[7] This desire to see Bowie appear in *Twin Peaks* is threefold: it is about the strangeness of a dead David Bowie giving animated life to the estrangement of the show; it is wanting to see an iconic, ghostly narrative foreshadow come to full apparition; and it is a loving, painful wish to see and hear the Black Star rise again, if only because our lives are painfully bare without him.

Here Now. In a 1978 interview, David Bowie jokingly claimed: "I don't want to be an actor, not really. . . . I want to be a rock star, go on let me."[8] The criticism that David Bowie wasn't foremost an actor, and that he couldn't act beyond particular "perfect fit" star roles, has in one sense limited both the lens through which this screen work is viewed and the scholarship that has analyzed his film and television acting. Bowie's screen work is often seen in light of his music career and as being of secondary importance. Of course, Bowie's career has always been one in which various performance and artistic registers were in intersectional lock with his music. As Sara Cody outlines in relation to his Berlin period:

> Long fascinated by German Expressionism, Bowie used the "Heroes" portrait—created in collaboration with photographer Masayoshi Sukita—to pay homage to painter and printmaker Erich Heckel. Heckel's Roquairol (1917), which Bowie had encountered at the Brücke Museum in Berlin, was the primary inspiration for "Heroes," the blank gaze and stiff posture of its subject (Heckel's friend and fellow artist, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner) reinterpreted in Bowie's own vacant stare and enigmatic hand positions.[9]

6 Ibid.

7 Ben Beaumont-Thomas, "David Lynch Dedicates *Twin Peaks* Episode to David Bowie," *The Guardian*, August 14, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/music/2017/aug/14/david-lynch-dedicates-twin-peaks-episode-to-david-bowie.

8 David Bowie, interview by Molly Meldrum, *Countdown*, ABC, November 10, 1978.

9 Sara Cody, "'Watch That Man': David Bowie and Portraiture," *Unframed*, January 20, 2016, http://unframed.lacma.org/2016/01/20/watch-man-david-bowie-and-portraiture.

Bowie has always acted out various roles and parts while on stage or performing live: he is a nuanced performer of many masks and artistic personae, and these are intimately connected to the screen art he consumes, the art he is influenced by, and his own mime training with Lindsay Kemp. Indeed, he employs the trope of the artist stirring the senses in the traditional mold of "the actor," "the painter," "the philosopher," "the writer," and "the musician"—the parallel drawn here is that David Bowie remains all of these characters in one imaginatively complementary form. Of his craft, Bowie asserted: "I'm Pierrot. I'm Everyman. What I'm doing is theatre, and only theatre. . . . I'm using myself as a canvas and trying to paint the truth of our time on it."[10] Over a decade prior, he was himself cast as "art come to life" in the 1967 film *The Image*, written and directed by Michael Armstrong, who described it as "a study of the illusionary reality world within the schizophrenic mind of the artist at his point of creativity."[11] One can see that through Bowie's work over time he strikes upon emotional disturbance, the clear antithesis to epicureanism with its avoidance of pain in the pursuit of pleasure, to instead actively and sometimes painfully use emotion, and to channel affect into critical contemplation for his audiences.

In this In Focus, we attempt to put Bowie's screen work at center stage, to give this body of work due critical weight. In so doing, we look to both explore the various screen roles he has taken on and to connect these performances to related questions of genre, form, authorship, stardom, identity, and difference. The essays here have been chosen for how they carefully navigate his various screen roles and for their theoretical and illustrative points of difference. Taken together, however, they witness the art of David Bowie on-screen.

Approaching David Bowie's play with erotic sadomasochism, Rosalind Galt's article finds that his on-screen performances in *Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence* (Nagisa Oshima, 1983) and *Labyrinth* (Jim Henson, 1986) inevitably unsettle the viewing position offered in ways that are visceral and corporeal rather than didactic or deterministic. Galt notes that while these films infrequently center overly on issues of identity, gender, or desire, the resulting spectorial position is nonetheless one where these subjectivities are never taken for granted. She argues that David Bowie tenaciously rearranges cinema's regimes of eroticized vision.

If Galt finds in Bowie's performances the evocation of sadistic and masochistic viewing positions and pleasures, then Angela Ndalianis looks to map the ways in which David Bowie enacts a recognizable "science fictionality" in films such as *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (Nicolas Roeg, 1976). Ndalianis suggests that in drawing creatively on themes and images drawn from science fiction, Bowie not only redraws the boundaries of the genre but also becomes an alien form of science fiction.

Sean Redmond is concerned not with the major screen roles that Bowie has undertaken but with the very minor ones. Exploring David Bowie's mutable but intersecting cameo performances, Redmond undertakes a textual analysis of the films

10 David Bowie, interviewed in Jean Rook, "Waiting for Bowie—and Finding a Genius Who Insists He's Really a Clown," in *The Bowie Companion*, ed. Elizabeth Thomson and David Gutman (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 1996), 133–135.

11 Michael Armstrong interview by Kimberly Lindbergs, "David Bowie Is the Image (1967)," *Cinebeats*, October 28, 2008, http://cinebeats.wordpress.com/2008/10/27/david-bowie-is-the-image-1967/.

Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me (David Lynch, 1992), *Zoolander* (Ben Stiller, 2001), and the BBC television series *Extras* (Ricky Gervais, 2005–2006). Drawing on theories of modernism and postmodernism, Redmond argues that *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* positions Bowie between these two competing registers, both of which can be found in the polysemic star image he brings to the cameo. In *Zoolander*, by contrast, Bowie is fully drawn as postmodern cameo, a poseur striking a "pose," self-reflexive and self-conscious, critical of the fashion world he finds himself in while being deeply embedded in its associations. In *Extras*, Bowie is again captured between modernist and postmodernist tendencies, a cameo cast in past and present "tenses." Redmond concludes that across these three cameos articulations emerge that demonstrate that "David Bowie" is always in cameo.

A gossamer veil hangs between the notion of David Bowie in cameo and David Bowie the icon. Toija Cinque's article asserts that David Bowie's part as Andy Warhol in the film *Basquiat* (Julian Schnabel, 1996), about New York "graffiti artist" Jean-Michel Basquiat, is one of special note. Cinque presents two binary relationships, involving, on the one hand, Bowie and Warhol as real-life media self-constructions and pop icons and, on the other, the ways the film depicts the dyadic relationship between Basquiat and Warhol in the art world of New York.

This In Focus, following a trajectory that traverses sexual difference and erotic performance, via the ideas of life being held "true" by art, to being always in cameo, and to remaining a star icon of the contemporary era, perhaps naturally concludes with an article that addresses Bowie's relationship to screen death and art. Jacqueline Furby's article focuses on three intrinsic areas: the violence found in a Bowie performance, Bowie's corporeal identity, and death in/as art form. Through a close textual analysis of *Baal* and *The Hunger*, Furby delicately hints at the eschatological undercurrents found in Bowie's screen art. Her essay adroitly positions his works as affording spaces of "shadows," wherein the nexus between life and death, via presence and absence, has fans being promised and denied his "desirable body."

Through his performances, even now, Bowie continues to make the familiar strange. ✻

David Bowie's Perverse Cinematic Body

by Rosalind Galt

In his films as much as his music, David Bowie embodies a mode of queer performance in which gender and sexuality are never straightforward. His films do not always foreground issues of identity or desire, yet his on-screen physical presence unsettles us in ways that are visceral and corporeal. Julie Lobalzo-Wright argues that Bowie's constant transformation and theatricality lack the consistency necessary for an effective movie-star image. Instead, she suggests, his transgressive image and inauthentic performance of gender work only where they mesh with the character he plays—as in *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (Nicolas Roeg, 1976).[1] This is not quite to say that Bowie is a star who always plays himself in film, but rather that his performances are most resonant when his oddity centers a queerly disoriented textual system. Bowie's success as an actor comes in some measure from his ability to select directors who could harness and amplify these qualities. Such a recognition allows us to juxtapose his performances for Oshima Nagisa and Jim Henson, two figures who are surely not often considered together. While the homoerotics of Bowie's star image have been analyzed extensively, considering his films with these two directors enables a focus on another crucial aspect of his queer performance: his play with sadomasochistic erotics.

In *Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence* (Oshima Nagisa, 1983), the intense relationship between Bowie and Ryuichi Sakamoto, as Allied captive and Japanese commander in a World War II prisoner-of-war camp, develops a BDSM-inflected regime of homoerotic visuality with Bowie's body at its core. *Labyrinth* (Jim Henson, 1986) is much more mainstream, yet Bowie's transgressive sexuality as Jareth the Goblin King is bold and textually excessive in a children's film. The film's cult status developed largely from audience response to Bowie's physical embodiment of the dominant and dangerous Jareth. These performances are not only queerly unstable; they are more specifically perverse. Feminist film theory teaches us to understand spectatorship as bisexual and polymorphous, sadistic and masochistic, and Bowie materializes that potential in his on-screen body. Bowie alludes to

1 Julie Lobalzo-Wright, "David Bowie, the Extraordinary Rock Star as Film Star," in *David Bowie: Critical Perspectives*, ed. Eoin Devereux, Aileen Dillane, and Martin J. Power (London: Routledge, 2015), 240–241.

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BDSM at many points in his career, from being repeatedly tied up with rope onstage to playing with handcuffs in *The Linguini Incident* (Richard Shepard, 1991). But it is these two films that most vividly foreground his body in relation to perversity. Focusing on the sexual power dynamics of *Labyrinth* and *Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence*, I argue that Bowie insistently rearranges cinema's regimes of eroticized vision.

In one of her influential accounts of pornography, Linda Williams outlines cinema's doubled structure of perversion. First there is the explicit content of pornography, then cinema itself as perversion: the apparatus gives us access to acts and bodies distant from us in space and time. She concludes, "In hard-core sadomasochistic pornography we thus encounter a double perversion: perverse acts and the perverse pleasure of viewing these acts."[2] Of course, neither *Labyrinth* nor *Merry Christmas* is pornographic, but this doubled structure nonetheless helps us clarify how these films—and Bowie's performance in them—can be read productively through the lens of BDSM. *Merry Christmas* shows us perverse acts such as Bowie's Major Jack Celliers being bound with rope and prisoners being beaten, and then invites viewers to interpret them perversely. In their diegetic context, these violent acts are neither consensual nor sexual, yet Oshima conjoins the regimes of bodily violence and desire. *Labyrinth* offers us the perverse spectacle of Bowie in leather outfits and makeup, casually wielding a black riding crop, and its mode of address similarly invites the young viewer to respond sexually. Narratively, Jareth is the antagonist, but, as with Celliers, the spectator's affective relationship to him is shot through with an erotics of power.

Williams also usefully points out the difference between sadism as "clinical perversion" and "the more socially normative voyeurism and fetishism inscribed in cinematic discourse itself."[3] Beyond her context of BDSM porn, this distinction explains the gap between the conventional ways that feminist film theory discusses sadism and masochism (as integral to classical spectatorial relations) and the more explicitly erotic, corporeal regime of sadomasochistic vision, sensation, and pleasure that these films create. Whereas classical spectatorship contains sadistic and masochistic impulses within patriarchal normativity, Bowie's performances in these quite different films evoke these desires to dirtier, more disruptive ends.

In both films, Bowie's physical presence is unsettling, his characters' interruption of the narrative reflecting his physical disruption of the diegesis. In *Merry Christmas*, Tom Conti's Lawrence and Takeshi Kitano's Hara discuss a Dutch soldier, condemned for homosexual activity. The conversation is interrupted by the news that "a new prisoner has arrived." Hara replies, "Another queer is here." Even before we see Celliers, he is prefigured as queer, and moreover as a queer who is bound to cause trouble. In *Labyrinth*, Bowie's Jareth is also narratively disruptive, stealing Sarah's (Jennifer Connelly) baby brother and demanding that she enter the labyrinth to save him. But his physical disruption is in excess of this role, as is demonstrated by fan response to the film, which is closely focused on the erotic effect of his costume and sexually

2 Linda Williams, "Power, Pleasure, and Subversion: Sadomasochistic Film Pornography," *Representations* 27 (1989): 38.

3 Ibid., 39.

provocative presence.[4] In the behind-the-scenes documentary *Inside the Labyrinth* (Des Saunders, 1986), Bowie admits that he sees Jareth as a reluctant Goblin King, adding, "One gets the feeling he'd rather be down in Soho or somewhere like that." Bowie plays Jareth as at home in a London neighborhood known for gay subculture and sleazy sex clubs, piercing both Sarah's suburban world and the labyrinth's fantastical puppet-filled space.

This sense of disruption or excess in Bowie's physical performance is well documented as a performative and nonnaturalistic acting style. Karen Jaehne writes that Bowie's "tactics are those of his musical performances. . . . Bowie does not embody or act; he represents."[5] But this effect isn't merely a lingering artifact of his fame but a queerly destabilizing use of his always-excessive star body. Corporeal performance and sadomasochism are linked early in *Merry Christmas* in a scene in which Celliers undergoes a mock execution. Believing that he is to be killed, he delays the Japanese guards with a charade of quotidian routines in which he mimes shaving and making a cup of tea. At first he vocalizes a stereotypical British soldier—perhaps the straight-arrow leader of the prisoners of war, Captain Hicksley—describing his wife and two kids, "one with, one without," using a silly voice for this gender-normative figure. Suddenly, he crumbles and, unable to sustain the act, returns to his regular voice. The guards take him into a hall where another kind of charade is to take place, this time a firing squad. Celliers is shackled with his arms spread wide above his head while the Japanese troops pretend to fire on either side of him.

To be sure, there is a reference to Bowie's use of mime in his musical performances here, but he's also aping a very specific masculine stereotype, mimicking from some distance a David Niven–style wartime film heroism. This is the scene where he comes closest to falling apart, taking on a stiff upper lip as a joking pastiche exactly at the moment he can no longer do it for real. In a way, that's as stiff upper lip as it gets, revealing bravery as a facade precisely by doubling down on its gestural mechanisms, but it's also a betrayal of his inability to sustain that mode of masculinity. In its gestural slippage, this is as much a queer moment as a rock-star one. Bowie's performance of performance distances Celliers from normative masculinity right at the point that the film invests bodily gesture with a ritualized and eroticized violence. Spread out with his arms bound above his head, Bowie refuses a certain type of gendered embodiment in order to function more flexibly within Oshima's sadomasochistic visual regime. In the long shot in which his body is displayed as a masochistic spectacle, we are primed to read both Celliers's humiliation and Bowie's queerness. The scene makes plain the centrality of perversity both to Bowie's performance and to the landscape of the film.

Merry Christmas opens with a Japanese soldier beating a prisoner and follows this scene of brutality with a ritualized humiliation. Soldiers surround two prone men, demanding they confess to a homosexual act. In this classical scene of beating and exposure, the film offers both a sadistic and a masochistic position to the spectator. It is, of course, quite usual to read Oshima's films in terms of homoeroticism and

4 See, for example, Nona Willis Aronowitz, "David Bowie's Sexy Goblin King in *Labyrinth* Taught Us about Lust," *Fusion*, December 1, 2016, http://fusion.net/story/254409/labyrinth-david-bowie-appreciation-sex/.

5 Karen Jaehne, review of *Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence*, *Film Quarterly* 37, no. 3 (1984): 44.

power. For instance, Mehdi Derfoufi links Celliers's sexuality and Yonoi's attraction to him to Japanese postwar discourses of masculinity in crisis and to Yukio Mishima's account of homosexuality. "As for Celliers," he writes, "he makes use of his charisma to provoke the destabilization of Japanese male power."[6] Bowie's queer masculinity, charisma, and destabilization of male power begin to describe the complex sexual hierarchies at play in his performance.

The ambivalence of Celliers's relation to power becomes clear in the court scene in which his character is introduced. We first hear him spoken about ("the defendant is a very difficult man") before a lengthy shot of him from behind. Bowie is dramatically revealed in a 180-degree cut to a frontal close-up, both as an anticipated star presence and as a character to whom Yonoi is clearly attracted. In a series of reverse shots, the scene constructs between Yonoi and Celliers both desiring looks and a battle for control. Sakamoto's score over a slow track toward Yonoi hints strongly at the Japanese officer's nascent desire. Celliers is the prisoner, powerless in relation to the Japanese state, but he asserts a perverse control through bodily display. Yonoi dismissively asks if Celliers can prove his claim that he had been beaten, in response to which Celliers suggestively unbuttons his shirt and pulls it down to reveal lash marks on his back. "Put your shirt on!" Yonoi demands. As it does throughout the film, physical punishment mediates an eroticized play of looks.

In the POW camp, Celliers is assuredly powerless, and Yonoi holds the power of life and death over him. Yet Celliers undermines Yonoi's control, and the ambiguity of their relationship gives the film at once its political and sexual force. Sean Redmond analyzes this ambiguity in terms of Bowie's whiteness. On the one hand, as a white, Western man, he represents the "apex of identity power relations," yet on the other hand, "his whiteness is the material out of which an alien androgyny and an unstable sexuality emerge."[7] Redmond argues that Bowie makes whiteness visible, even if he must ultimately reiterate and replicate its cultural power. This denaturalized whiteness contributes to the film's eroticization of power. Bowie is the object of Yonoi's gaze, taking up a conventionally feminized position in the image, and, as Earl Jackson argues, his being the object of an Asian man's gaze proposes a loss of mastery that makes white viewers uncomfortable.[8] It's surely true that the film plays deliberately with such geopolitical identifications and dis-identifications, but what if Celliers's powerlessness might produce responses other than racial discomfort?

The powerless Celliers is the object of a desiring gaze and is often filmed lying down. In several scenes, we encounter him prone, shot from a low angle, the camera looking up at his face. These shots are intimate, proximate, and yet they also introduce a sense of distance. He's a totemic figure here and never available to touch. Derfoufi says that "Oshima films Bowie the way Sternberg filmed Marlene Dietrich," which is

6 Mehdi Derfoufi, "Embodying Stardom, Representing Otherness: David Bowie in *Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence*," in *David Bowie Critical Perspectives*, ed. Eoin Devereux, Aileen Dillane, and Martin J. Power (London: Routledge, 2015), 165.

7 Sean Redmond, "The Whiteness of David Bowie," in *Enchanting David Bowie: Space Time Body Memory*, ed. Toija Cinque, Christopher Moore, and Sean Redmond (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 215.

8 Earl Jackson Jr., "Desire at Cross(-Cultural) Purposes: *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* and *Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence*," *positions* 2, no. 1 (1994): 159.

to say with a masochistic attention to detail.[9] Bowie is fetishized, trapped in the frame as an impossibly beautiful object of desire. But the film also traps him sadistically, subjecting him to beatings and torture. As the film progresses, his body becomes broken and dirty, his iconic blond hair wild. His performance provokes the spectator to enjoy both of these impulses, masochistic and sadistic at once.

As object of the gaze, Bowie performs knowingness and insouciance, chemistry and disdain. From the outset, when Celliers strips for Yonoi, he takes control of a situation supposedly defined by his punishment, and this perverse relationality comes to define the power struggle between the two men. When Yonoi demands that the entire camp fast, Celliers brings a basket filled with forbidden buns and flowers to the men. When confronted, he eats one of the flowers, slowly stuffing the bright pink petals into his mouth. He is unruly and refuses orders; like a badly behaved bottom who is asking to be punished, he taunts Yonoi, daring him to respond. His cockiness—the "soldier's soldier" of Lawrence's description—is easily transformed into queer affect. For Katsuhiko Suganuma, this "continuous rebellion does, in fact, render Yonoi's subjectivity unstable, underscoring for others his constant failings to sustain his own status as a Japanese Imperial/master subject."[10] He means "master" in a psychoanalytic way, of course, but it's hard not to hear kinky echoes. Celliers is topping from the bottom, and it works.

Of course, the film doesn't give Celliers the upper hand forever, and its climax comes when he kisses Yonoi in a moment etched in the memories of a generation of art-cinematically inclined queers. The brief but consequential gesture slows down the film in a series of overlapping shots replete with queer temporality and the aching sense of a next-to-impossible tactility. As Maureen Turim puts it, the kiss is an assertion of all that Yonoi has repressed to become the controlled and controlling Japanese officer that he is as he whips out orders and literally whips anyone who defies him. To confront the other is presented as sexually charged. To expose that sexual investment is in this context to unravel the power of the sadistic command."[11] The kiss exposes exactly how sexual Yonoi's sadism has always been. But just as important is the next sequence in which Celliers is bound at the ankles and chest with rope. His refusal to submit to Yonoi has finally gone too far (which is to say, exactly far enough), and this time, the execution is not playacting. As with the earlier scene, though, it is introduced by an iconic image of Bowie in bondage, inviting an erotic investment no less than that of the kiss that preceded it. For both images, Williams's double perversity explains their forceful impression: not only are the acts powerfully erotic; Bowie's performance makes us vividly aware of the perversity of our gaze.

If *Merry Christmas* offers a pleasurable view of Bowie in bondage, then *Labyrinth* creates similarly perverse spectator relations out of his performance of domination and control. As Jareth, Bowie wears a series of spectacular New Romantic outfits, which

9 Derfoufi, "Embodying Stardom," 171.

10 Katsuhiko Suganuma, "Off-Genre: Notes on (Dis-)Locating Oshima Nagisa's *Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence* (1983)," *Reconstruction: Studies in Contemporary Culture* 16, no. 2 (2016): 7.

11 Maureen Turim, *The Films of Nagisa Oshima: Images of a Japanese Iconoclast* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 179.

combine foppish retro frills with more than a hint of the BDSM dungeon. We first encounter him in black leather when he tells Sarah that he has taken her baby brother. Later, he wears high black leather boots, tight gray pants, and a shiny black waistcoat. As is constantly noted by viewers and critics, he is costumed to emphasize his genitals, a strategy that makes spectators highly aware both of their own eroticized gaze and of his nonchalant display.[12] (This is how we imagine him in Soho.) Ensconced in his lair, his body is revealed in a fetishistic tilt up. The shot opens on a creature submissively polishing Jareth's boots, then tilts to reveal him languorously lounging across a chair, one leg hitched up, wearing black leather gloves and a high collar. He toppily tells off his sidekick, Hoggle, for helping Sarah, waving a black crop that he holds like a weapon. Gary Needham has used Linda Williams's concept of on/scenity to analyze the proliferation of BDSM discourses, such as gimp masks in popular cultural texts that aren't themselves porn.[13] Bowie's costuming and affect in *Labyrinth* no less than *Merry Christmas* instantiate this on/scenity well before it becomes mainstream.

Labyrinth's dialogue also plays with BDSM connotations, offering perverse incentives to read, as Sarah does, beyond its childhood fantasy space. Jareth is constantly giving orders, insisting, "Sarah, don't defy me." His sexual power makes a girl forget her familial commitments and quasi-maternal duties, so that by the film's climax she is in danger of becoming his spellbound slave. Jareth threatens: "I have been generous but I can be cruel. . . . [Y]ou asked that the child be taken and I took him . . . . I have turned the world upside down and I have done it for you." He's a manipulative top who says, "Just let me rule you and you can have everything you want. . . . [J]ust fear me, love me, do as I say . . . and I will be your slave." The language of master-slave relations is overt by this point, but Sarah insists, "You have no power over me," and breaks the spell without the need for violence. These intimations of BDSM are not mere subtext but center *Labyrinth*'s fantasy of sexual subjectivity. The film's fairy tale is a space of destabilizing sexual potential, a nightmare in which Bowie is the linchpin of a dangerous system. If Henson's puppets promise to make its fantasy world cute, then Bowie's Jareth transforms it from a childhood space of friendly monsters to something more threatening, in which power is eroticized.

The point at which Jareth's sexual dominance is most explicit is the masquerade ball scene, a seduction fantasy that T. S. Miller describes as containing a "superabundance of phallic imagery" in which "dripping candles, outsized wands, a serpentine staff, and protuberant noses and horns adorning all of the masks further accent Jareth's always-prominent genital bulge."[14] More than this phallic landscape, though, the richness and decadence of the mise-en-scène promises perversion. The image heaves with

12 For example, Tom Holste describes "an extremely well-endowed pair of tight pants" in "Finding Your Way through *Labyrinth*," in *The Wider Worlds of Jim Henson: Essays on His Work and Legacy beyond "The Muppet Show" and "Sesame Street,"* ed. Jennifer C. Garlen and Anissa M. Graham (London: McFarland, 2013), 126. In a more popular vein, Cate Owen typifies fan engagement in "A Critical Analysis of David Bowie's *Labyrinth* Pants," *Cake Oven*, February 2015, http://www.cakeoven.co.nz/2015/02/labyrinth-david-bowies-pants.

13 Gary Needham, "Bringing Out the Gimp: Fashioning the SM Imaginary," *Fashion Theory* 18, no. 2 (2015): 149–168; and Linda Williams, "Porn Studies: Proliferating Pornographies On/Scene," in *Porn Studies*, ed. Linda Williams (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 3.

14 T. S. Miller, "The Two Kings and the Two Labyrinths: Escaping Escapism in Henson's *Labyrinth* and del Toro's *Laberinto*," *Extrapolation* 52, no. 1 (2011): 30–31.

elaborate horned masks of monstrous animal faces, embellished fans, puffy sleeves, shiny textiles, candles dripping with loops of beads, feathered hats, and so on. It's a mixture of Venetian, eighteenth-century, and New Romantic retro that evokes at once the historical erotics of Casanova and Sade and the near-contemporary queer, postpunk scene. It's more commercial, more swoopingly romantic than Federico Fellini, Ken Russell, or Leigh Bowery, but these connotations bespeak dissident sexual cultures as much as fairytale romance. The sense of debauchery is cemented in a series of shots in which Jareth dances with two people at once while partygoers crowd Sarah: the fantasy space he has conjured is polymorphous and orgiastic.

The threat of Jareth's seduction is audible in the song "As the World Falls Down," which Bowie sings through the scene. In melody and form it's a love song, but many lyrics suggest something darker ("As the pain sweeps through / makes no sense for you"). Even "I'll be there for you as the world falls down" has a double meaning, intimating that it is Jareth who will make the world fall down in order to trap the song's romantic object. As Jareth approaches, decadence tips into danger and Sarah's romantic worldview fractures. When she begins to dance with Jareth, we enter a series of vertiginous dissolving pans in which masked characters are framed frontally as if leering at Sarah. This briefly queasy optical point of view articulates her loss of control. At this point, the song also becomes repetitive, with Bowie singing "falling" over and over: the love story disintegrates as Sarah finds herself disoriented and trapped.

Alongside these formal elements, what makes the scene unnerving is that there are, for the first time in this fantasy diegesis, no nonhuman creatures. The film's balance of fantasy and reality is radically upended, and suddenly we find ourselves watching Bowie attempting to seduce the much younger Connelly. Adam Trainer doesn't see Bowie's sexuality as central. For him, Sarah's relationship with Jareth is "an obtrusive distraction at the film's climax and perhaps an unnecessary excuse to draw in a youth audience, who would be interested in seeing Bowie, now a pop idol, in a romantic role."[15] I argue that this mismatch in age and power is very much to the film's point, not least because it's addressed partly at young girls who desire David Bowie. Indeed, the scene is Sarah's fantasy, as constructed for her by Jareth (and, of course, Henson). If Jareth contains more than a hint of the creepily coercive older man, Bowie's performance renders that power structure theatrical rather than naturalized. Where *Merry Christmas* makes visible the power dynamics of racialized desire, *Labyrinth* plays with the equally uneasy power differentials of age and gender.

Sarah's sense of being trapped (the first image of her at the ball shows her as a tiny figure in a golden cage, looking a bit like Lola Montes) prompts us to think about the gender politics of dominance in *Labyrinth*. Popular feminist accounts of the film often describe an abusive relationship in which Sarah is drugged and essentially date-raped by Jareth and view the narrative of a pretty young woman being attracted to a creepy older man as a patriarchal fantasy of male filmmakers. One blog describes Jareth in psychological terms as an abusive partner, who has "drugged her, isolated

15 Adam Trainer, "'Well, I Wouldn't Buy the Merchandise': David Bowie as Postmodern Auteur," *Senses of Cinema* 28 (2003): http://sensesofcinema.com/2003/cinema-and-music/bowie_postmodern_auteur/.

her from her friends, and attempted to confuse her."[16] The feminist magazine *Bust* refers to the peach Jareth gives Sarah as injected "with date rape drugs."[17] Read this way, the film is sexist, and its evocation of sexual power dynamics evokes not BDSM but male violence. More interesting female-authored analyses that laud the film as feminist retain this reading but emphasize Sarah's agency in refusing the manipulative and abusive Jareth. In a move that's repeated across many accounts of the film, Sarah Marshall cites Sarah's "you have no power over me" line as a central moment in the emergence of her feminism.[18]

We could read the film very differently by seeing the framing narrative as a representation of patriarchal normativity and the ending as the lesson taught to Sarah that looking after babies is her duty and that she must accept parental authority and a reproductive role. In this logic, the labyrinth is a space of escape from heteronormative relationality. (In their final confrontation in a disorienting Escher-like space of multiple staircases, Sarah jumps into thin air to rescue the baby—she wants normativity more than life.) Of course, both could be true: the space of escape can be read as just another trap, and antinormative subcultures can also be filled with creepy men. The overlap of sexual dominance as queer perversion with sexual dominance as patriarchal business as usual is so much closer in a male-female pairing, and Sarah's youth redoubles the risks of this power differential. But as with film theory's reading of the femme fatale, what makes the film memorable is the performance of transgression, not of recuperation. Bowie's Jareth is sexy regardless of the role he ultimately plays in the narrative. As Marshall puts it, "No matter how much he tried to speak lines that hinted only at his tyranny, he also created a realm of possibility: of sexual verve, of gender fluidity, of performance bordering on magic."[19] Bowie's performance makes Jareth at once threatening and seductively perverse. This doubling is demonstrated in the responses of writers who love Sarah's rejection of patriarchal dominance while at the same time avidly consuming Jareth's BDSM dominance as a mode and object of desire.[20] Bowie's fluidity enables both readings to coexist, and it's this performative sexual complexity that derails the film's otherwise rather regressive narrative of maternal femininity.

That these roles stage both dominance and submission, offering variously sadistic and masochistic identifications, is integral to Bowie's perverse mode of performance. As Freud noted in his "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality," "the most remarkable feature of this perversion is that its active and passive forms are habitually found together in the same individual. A person who feels pleasure in producing pain in someone else

16 Lauredhel, "*Labyrinth* as Feminist Myth," *Hoyden about Town* (blog), July 28, 2009, https://hoydenabouttown.com/2009/07/28/the-labyrinth-as-feminist-myth. See also Adam Quigley, "Is Jim Henson's *Labyrinth* an Allegory for Date Rape?," *Slashfilm*, April 1, 2011, http://www.slashfilm.com/jim-hensons-labyrinth-allegory-date-rape/ and many others.

17 Ali Drucker, "David Bowie, Jim Henson, and the Sexual Awakening of Millennial Women," *Bust*, January 11, 2016, http://bust.com/movies/15387-david-bowie-jim-henson-and-the-sexual-awakening-of-millennial-women.html.

18 Sam Marshall, "You Have No Power over Me: Life Lessons from *Labyrinth*," *Bitch Media,* January 11, 2016, https://www.bitchmedia.org/david-bowie-tribute-labyrinth-feminist-jareth-embrace-change.

19 Ibid.

20 See, for example, Carrie S., "We Love Villains: The Strange Appeal of Jareth from *Labyrinth*," *Smart Bitches, Trashy Books,* July 28, 2015, http://smartbitchestrashybooks.com/2015/07/love-villains-strange-appeal-jareth-labyrinth.

in a sexual relationship is also capable of enjoying as pleasure any pain which he may himself derive from sexual relations. A sadist is always at the same time a masochist."[21] And as Parveen Adams points out, "In 1915 the interchangeablity of these positions is reiterated and extended to the positions of voyeur and exhibitionist."[22] This oscillation is of course characteristic of the cinematic spectator, and Bowie amplifies that fluidity in his play with perverse identifications and desires. In *Merry Christmas*, *Labyrinth*, and beyond, we see in Bowie's stardom the construction of a cinematic switch, whose fluidity enables the spectator to enjoy multiple positions in relation to identification, desire, gender, and sexual power. ✻

21 Sigmund Freud, *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 7, *A Case of Hysteria, Three Essays on Sexuality and Other Works*, trans. James Strachey and Anna Freud (London: Vintage, 2001), 167.

22 Parveen Adams, "Per Os(scillation)," *Camera Obscura* 17 (1988): 8.

Bowie and Science Fiction / Bowie as Science Fiction

by Angela Ndalianis

On July 11, 1969—nine days before the Apollo 11 moon landing—David Bowie's song "Space Oddity" was released, and history changed. When news presenter Cliff Michelmore announced during the BBC's coverage of the Apollo 11 mission, "This was the most historic journey in the history of Man [*sic*]," another historic journey was also in the making.[1] The journey, of course, was that of David Bowie, rock icon, who would leave his mark on the music, ideology, and identity of many generations to follow. The London BBC "studio set consisted of a long, angled desk, large models of the moon and earth, and a large picture of a rocket against a dark, 'cosmic'-type background."[2] To add to the science fiction–like mood of the set, Bowie's "Space Oddity" was chosen by the BBC as the theme song to accompany its coverage of this transformational event that officially

1 Cliff Michelmore made this announcement four days before the landing of the lunar module *Eagle* on July 20, which is when the world watched as Neil Armstrong (mission commander) and Buzz Aldrin (pilot) planted the first human steps on the moon's surface, leaving Michael Collins behind to pilot the command module *Columbia* in space. See "BBC Apollo Moon Landing Coverage," *Internet Archive Wayback Machine*, https://web.archive.org/web/20110723002705/http://www.tvhistory.btinternet.co.uk/html/moon_tv_cov.html.

2 "BBC Apollo Moon Landing Coverage."

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ended the so-called Space Race. Unfortunately, most of the BBC coverage between July 16 and 24 of the Apollo 11 mission has been lost (most likely destroyed), but the play and replay of Bowie's "Space Oddity," a song (ironically) about the astronaut Major Tom whose failed mission sets him afloat in his capsule into the vastness of outer space, was the beginning of a journey that would establish Bowie as an icon of science fiction.[3] The key premise of the song's narrative, its music video, and its title were clearly inspired by *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Stanley Kubrick, 1968), which Bowie had watched three times on its release at the Casino Cinerama in London.[4] Like Frank Poole in *2001*, Major Tom drifts aimlessly into empty space. The video clip, released as part of the publicity film *Love You till Tuesday* (Malcolm J. Thomson, 1969), drives home the science-fiction elements further still (albeit an extremely low-budget rendition when compared to Kubrick's megaspectacle). Bowie as Major Tom is dressed in a silver space suit and boots, and as "his sanity collapses when confronted with the vastness of space," he becomes divorced from his capsule, floating in space flanked by two alien space nymphs.[5]

From the 1960s, Bowie's stage, film, and music personae—Major Tom, Ziggy Stardust, Aladdin Sane, the Thin White Duke, Thomas Newton—reflect his fascination with science fiction. This essay focuses on how Bowie drew creatively on themes and images of science fiction (e.g., aliens, dystopian and apocalyptic futures, space exploration) as well as the works of directors and writers like Stanley Kubrick, George Orwell, Philip K. Dick, Robert Heinlein, and writers and artists from Marvel Comics and translated them into his music, rock performances, and music videos. Not only does science fiction's examination of the meaning of human existence and identity enter his creative output and inform his fluid identity as a performer; it stretched and broke the boundaries of what defined pop music in the process. In what follows I argue that David Bowie embodies a recognizable "science fictionality." Bowie's relationship with and embodiment of science fiction is explored through Richard Dawkins's concept of the meme: a semiotic unit of information that, like genes, has the capacity to replicate, evolve, and spread contagiously across culture.[6] Through various examples of screen media, I follow the ways in which his output contagiously filtered into popular culture, forming a logic of its own. In the process, Bowie as science fiction has become a stable memetic complex, spreading its memes and becoming its own distinctive form of science-fiction thinking.

In his book *Science Fiction after 1900: From the Steam Man to the Stars*, Brooks Landon argues that science-fiction themes have begun to slip outside the boundaries of science

3 For information about the footage that still exists, see "BBC Coverage Known to Exist," *Internet Archive Wayback Machine,* https://web.archive.org/web/20110723002739/http://www.tvhistory.btinternet.co.uk/html/moon_recordings.html.

4 The science-fiction motif of the astronaut floating in space has also been interpreted as a metaphor for the experience of a drug-induced high. As Bowie's lyrics in "Ashes to Ashes" (1980) explain, Major Tom (a reflection of Bowie) was a "junkie, strung out in heavens high, hitting an all-time low." On Bowie's viewing of *2001*, see Dylan Jones, *When Ziggy Played Guitar: David Bowie and Four Minutes That Shook the World* (London: Preface, 2012), 36.

5 Maureen King, "Future Legends: David Bowie and Science Fiction," in *Trajectories of the Fantastic*, ed. Michael A. Morrison (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 1997), 130.

6 Richard Dawkins, "Memes: The New Replicators," in *The Selfish Gene* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 245.

fiction and have entered the immediate social realm, producing a form of "science fiction thinking":

> Perhaps most singularly, science fiction thinking refers to the process by which science fiction is read, for twentieth-century science fiction has become an extratextual phenomenon as well as a body of texts sharing similar characteristics. Whether in the form of organized "fandom" or in a more loosely held sense of participation among science fiction readers . . . [it involves] a subculture of values and expectations endlessly discussed and debated by its writers, readers, and critics across a range of media and forums.[7]

In *The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction*, Istvan Csicsery-Ronay develops this idea further still, stating:

> This widespread normalization of what is essentially a style of estrangement and dislocation has stimulated the development of science-fictional habits of mind, so that we no longer treat sf as purely a genre-engine producing formulaic effects, but rather as a kind of awareness we might call science-fictionality, a mode of response that frames and tests experiences as if they were aspects of a work of science fiction.[8]

Here, I consider Bowie in Landon's terms, as "an extratextual phenomenon" whose output and persona represented "a body of texts" that were imbued with "science-fiction thinking," or, in the words of Csicsery-Ronay, came to represent a Bowie "science fictionality." Maureen King writes that Bowie's fascination with science fiction began early in his career, "not only in his lyrics and music, but in his album covers, concert performances, videos, and film roles. Grim visions of the future, warnings about the dangers of technology, and haunting portrayals of the alien run like unifying threads through what is creatively the most productive period of Bowie's career."[9] Many of Bowie's songs and videos during this period use science-fiction themes and imagery to address cultural, social, and generational upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s. Adopting science fiction as a strategy, he projects current issues into the future with the result that key science-fiction themes and icons emerge. His contribution to the genre was, in fact, recognized when he was inducted in 2016 into the Science Fiction and Fantasy Hall of Fame.[10]

7 Brooks Landon, *Science Fiction after 1900: From the Steam Man to the Stars* (London: Routledge, 1997), 6–7.

8 Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr., *The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2011), 2.

9 King, "Future Legends," 129. King further states that "the song 'We Are Hungry Men,' on Bowie's first album, *David Bowie* (1967), presents an apocalyptic vision of an overpopulated and famine-stricken world facing imminent catastrophe. Blackly humorous, opening with mock news reports of a wildly escalating world population and concluding with the sounds of cannibals consuming their dinner, the song, as Peter and Leni Gillman rightly observe, 'serves as a trailer' (169) for many of the albums to come."

10 See "Science Fiction and Fantasy Hall of Fame," http://www.mopop.org/exhibits/museum-features/science-fiction-and-fantasy-hall-of-fame/.

Though most intense during the first decade of his career, Bowie's persona and musical output have drawn heavily on tropes of the science-fiction genre. Themes include dystopian and apocalyptic realities; aliens, alien messiahs, and identities "other" to the human "norm"; technological and scientific advancement out of control; genetic enhancement and the mutation or evolution of the human race; and space travel.[11] Bowie drew on a diverse range of science-fiction sources from cinema, television, literature, and comics, recombining them and fashioning them into new creations. Many of his works were directly inspired by science-fiction writers and filmmakers, including Stanley Kubrick, Fritz Lang, George Orwell, Chris Marker, William S. Burroughs, and Robert Heinlein. Likewise, Bowie's return to the concept of *Homo superior* (e.g., "Oh! You Pretty Things," "The Supermen") blended Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophical exploration of the *Übermensch* (superhuman, hyperhuman) from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883) with Stan Lee's more direct use of the term, which first appeared in his and Jack Kirby's first issue of *The X-Men* (Marvel Comics, September 1963) when the all-powerful mutant Magneto proclaims: "The day of the mutants is upon us! The first phase of my plan shall be to show my power . . . to make Homo Sapiens bow to Homo Superior!"[12] The generational angst and emphasis on alienation and otherness expressed by the young possessors of the mutant x-gene in the X-Men comics throughout the 1960s (and beyond) reflected the sentiments of 1960s counterculture.

Ken McLeod argues that "despite the rampant popularity of space, alien, and futuristic imagery in popular culture, little scholarship has recognized the impact of such themes on popular music."[13] Dave Allen makes a similar point, asserting that the intense popularity of science-fiction cinema and literature in the 1950s and 1960s paralleled the rise of rock music, so much so that science fiction was not only explored through themes in music, videos, and cover art, or in space-age costumes, but also in technological innovations in music that included new amplification systems and sonic experimentation in songs where the emphasis was on "purely electronic and synthetic sounds."[14] The groundbreaking film that first experimented with electronic sounds in

11 For dystopian and apocalyptic realities, see "Cygnet Committee" (1969), "Oh! You Pretty Things" (1971), *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* (1972), "Five Years" (1972), "Drive-In Saturday" (1973), *Diamond Dogs* (1974), and *Outside* (1995); for aliens and others, see "We Are the Hungry Men" (1967), *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* (1972), and "Blackstar" (2016); for technological and scientific advancement, see "We Are the Hungry Men" (1967), "Cygnet Committee" (1969), and "Saviour Machine" (1970); for genetics, see "The Supermen" (1970) and "Oh! You Pretty Things" (1971); for space travel, see "Space Oddity" (1969), "Life on Mars?" (1971), "Ashes to Ashes" (1980), "Hallo Spaceboy" (1995), and "Blackstar" (2016).

12 Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, *The X-Men*, issue 1 (Marvel Comics, September 1963), 12. The term "Homo superior" was also used in the UK television series *The Tomorrow People* (ITV Network, 1973–1979), but the series went to air after the release of "Oh! You Pretty Things" (1971). Bowie was most likely influenced by *The X-Men*. Brad J. Ricca also points out that the term was actually first used in the 1935 science-fiction novel *Odd John: A Story between Jest and Earnest*, by the British author Olaf Stapledon. See Brad J. Ricca, "Origin of the Species: Popular Science, Dr. Hermann Muller and the X-Men," in *The Ages of the X-Men: Essays on the Children of the Atom in Changing Times*, ed. Joseph J. Darowski (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2014), 12.

13 Ken McLeod, "Space Oddities: Aliens, Futurism and Meaning in Popular Music," *Popular Music* 22, no. 3 (2003): 337.

14 Dave Allen, "How High the Moon? Science Fiction and Popular Music," in *Sound and Music in Film and Visual Media*, ed. Graeme Harper, Ruth Doughty, and Jochen Eisentraut (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2009), 231 and 236.

the context of science fiction was *Forbidden Planet* (Fred M. Wilcox, 1956), credited in the film's titles as "Electric Tonalities" by Louis and Bebe Barron.[15] Other science-fiction films and television shows soon followed suit, including *Doctor Who* (1963–1989 and 2005–), whose title theme song and music were produced by the BBC's Radiophonic Workshop. These electronic, futuristic sounds were also important to Bowie's music, including his early use of the stylophone (stylus-operated pocket synthesizer) in "Space Oddity"—a sound effect that recurs in "Blackstar" decades later.[16]

Pink Floyd, Jimi Hendrix, the Alan Parsons Project, Golem, Jefferson Airplane, Marc Bolan—to name but a few—would all experiment with science-fiction themes, sounds, and music during the period. Allen makes the perceptive observation that "a great deal of late 1960s psychedelic music was optimistic, otherworldly, or metaphysical, but the real world of the 1970s was more complex, reflected in the science-fiction cinema of the period, which had a growing focus on issues such as nuclear holocaust, ecology, overpopulation, and urban unrest."[17] Science fiction came to embody the psyche of the younger generation, who felt disenfranchised and alienated from the world of their elders. Allen continues: "This kind of music and such films as *The Omega Man* (Boris Sagal, 1971) or *Soylent Green* (Richard Fleischer, 1973) offered entertainment with a message; and audiences became increasingly familiar with popular songs addressing political protest, biographical or topical narratives, dance routines, fantasy, teenage angst, and other themes including science fiction."[18] In many respects, however, David Bowie became the rock star most associated with science fiction—a connection greatly encouraged by his adoption of the Ziggy Stardust persona early on in his career.

When Bowie starred in *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (Nicolas Roeg, 1976), he had already introduced the world to characters Major Tom, Ziggy Stardust, Aladdin Sane (the Americanized Ziggy), and Halloween Jack, as well as the science fiction–inspired songs mentioned earlier. He had released the science-fiction concept albums *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* (1972) and *Diamond Dogs* (1974), as well as the worldwide tours that accompanied both, which further offered performances inspired by classic science-fiction tropes such as spacemen, aliens, and the coming apocalypse. By the time Bowie performed in *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, his alter ego, the alien Ziggy Stardust, had been forced into retirement on July 3, 1973, during a concert held at London's Hammersmith Odeon Theatre. As his persona transitioned between albums—*Aladdin Sane* (1973), *Pin Ups* (1973), and *Diamond Dogs* (1974)—Bowie retained Ziggy's famous hairstyle. The iconic presence of Ziggy's hair was enough to trigger the alien, science-fiction qualities that Bowie had come to represent. It is *Station to Station* (1976) that is often seen as introducing the Thin White Duke to the world by transferring his character Thomas Jerome Newton (the alien from *The Man Who Fell to Earth*) into his music; however, the new identity had begun to form earlier during the

15 Allen, "How High the Moon?," 236.

16 The stylophone was invented in 1967 by Brian Jarvis and manufactured and released by the British company Dubrek in 1968.

17 Allen, "How High the Moon?," 239.

18 Ibid., 242.

release of *Young Americans* (1975), as is evident in Bowie's live appearance on *The Cher Show* (CBS, 1975).

In the Thin White Duke character, we witness a slippage beyond science fiction. In Bowie's embodiment of the Thin White Duke, an extratextual phenomenon occurs. Bowie becomes a receptacle of science fictionality that extends beyond his songs, characters, concept albums plus tours, and music videos. In his article about *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, Bruce Bennett explains that "when viewed alongside the confident, expressive, naturalistic performances of experienced screen actors, Bowie's understated delivery of lines, approximation of accents and hesitant bodily presence can seem awkward and self-conscious, or even technically incompetent." He adds, "It is an example of what Richard Maltby terms 'autonomous performance'—acting that can make us aware that we are watching a performance through action and spectacle in contrast to an 'integrated performance' style in which a technically skilled actor is convincingly subsumed into a character."[19] Instead, it was less about types of performances and more about the fact that Bowie represented a well-established semiotic cluster of science-fiction meanings that had begun to develop a logic in its own right. Bowie's advantage in acting the role of Thomas Jerome Newton was that his very presence on screen brought with it the meanings associated with Bowie science fictionality.

Years later, Bowie's role as FBI agent Phillip Jeffries in *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* (David Lynch, 1992) similarly brought an uncanniness to the character. Defying the rules of time and space—in a scene that preempts the more extreme experimentation of screen imagery witnessed in episode 8 or "Part 8" of *Twin Peaks: The Return* (2017)—David Bowie struts out of an elevator looking very much like David Bowie in the early 1990s, complete with his combed-back hair, light-colored suit, and jacket with wide shoulders. If not for FBI bureau chief Gordon Cole (David Lynch) announcing the return of agent Phillip Jeffries, and Bowie's adoption of a Southern drawl, his initial appearance would scream to the viewer, "It's David Bowie!" As the scene progresses, it shifts into a fantastical space: while Phillip Jeffries attempts to tell his story, an alternative reality is laid over snippets of muffled dialogue taking place in the other reality at FBI headquarters. The scene then unravels like a Bowie music video, full of dystopian undertones and theatricality, and complete with a character wearing a commedia dell'arte mask with a pronounced nose. A young boy with blond hair is also shown wearing a similar mask. A young Jeffries? But then a monkey replaces the boy. The confusion of time and space—and the evocation of a quantum reality or, perhaps, time travel—is stressed through the speeding up and slowing down of visuals and sound, a technique that is associated with *Twin Peaks*' "other space." The surreal, fantastic worlds of David Lynch and David Bowie collide until, finally, Jeffries/Bowie disappears again, and the world returns to normal (as normal as can be for the world of Twin Peaks). From the moment Bowie exits the elevator and walks down the corridor of FBI headquarters, he brings with him the extratextual signification of "David Bowie," which includes concepts of otherness and the otherworldly, the

19 Bruce Bennett, "*The Man Who Fell to Earth*: The Film That Saw Bowie Cast as the Roeg Choice," *Conversation*, January 15, 2016, n.p.

fantastic and science fictional, and experimentation that flouts norms. The power of this scene and its evocation of spatial and temporal instabilities relies on the presence of Bowie as Phillip Jeffries.[20]

In early 1993, Bowie released the music video to "Jump They Say." Directed by Mark Romanek, the video returns to Bowie's fascination with science fiction and recalls his brief appearance in *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me*. The apocalyptic world depicted—which features Bowie singing at the top of a futuristic corporate building before finally jumping to his death at the end—is interspersed with sequences that draw heavily on Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (the backing singers are dressed like the air hostesses on *2001*'s Pan Am space plane), Chris Marker's *La jetée* (1962) (the images of Bowie being mind-tortured while wearing a virtual reality headset), and Jean-Luc Godard's film *Alphaville* (1965) (Bowie's angular, jerky movements at the beginning of the video, which mimic those of characters in corridors in *Alphaville* who have lost their connection to real space-time gravity). However, the music video also has echoes of his appearance in *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me*, in particular the repetition of Bowie entering and exiting an elevator and walking down a long corridor.

Bowie's science fictionality operates like a meme. In his book *The Selfish Gene*, Richard Dawkins set the stage for what would become an influential method for analyzing the cultural transmission of ideas. "Cultural transmission," he explained, "is analogous to genetic transmission in that . . . it can give rise to a form of evolution." He elaborates that "just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperms or eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation. . . . If the idea catches on, it can be said to propagate itself, spreading from brain to brain."[21] Developing Dawkins's theory, Susan Blackmore clarifies that memes possess "replicator power" in that their logic is one of evolution, survival, and expansion. The idea that is embodied within a meme aims to spread itself across culture. Furthermore, Blackmore points out "the important distinction between 'replicators' and their 'vehicles.' A replicator is anything of which copies are made, including 'active replicators' whose nature affects the chances of their being copied again. A vehicle is the entity that interacts with the environment."[22]

Establishing the connection with science fiction early in his career, Bowie became an "active replicator" of science fiction, his vehicles being his music, stage performances, music videos, films, personas, costumes, and so on. With each new example of a science-fiction theme, character, music, or narrative that Bowie introduced, he became more active as a replicator of science fiction to the point at which, even in the later years when his music and persona had abandoned the grander focus on science fiction, he remained consistently associated with "science fictionness." Consider, for example, the poster "Strife on Mars" (obviously a play on Bowie's "Life on Mars"),

20 In his essay in this issue's In Focus, "David Bowie: In Cameo," Sean Redmond also addresses the question of disjointed time and space in the film. He also sees Bowie's appearance as "David Bowie *in* cameo," and his slippage into the Jeffries character as a reflexive play on Bowie's own fluid star persona, and his performative adoption of alter egos.

21 Dawkins, "Memes," 192.

22 Susan Blackmore, *The Meme Machine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 5.

created by art director, designer, and illustrator Rory Phillips in 2013. The poster advertises a fictitious Japanese film "starring David Bowie as a Mecha Pilot battling Kaiju on Mars." The plotline reads, "Bowie plays Flight Captain of the 8th Mars Mecha Squadron, nicknamed 'The Spiders.' When Kaiju (strange giant monsters) from beyond the X dimension attack the human colonies of Mars, it's up to Bowie and The Spiders to save the last human outpost on Mars. With the help of plucky female scientist Rin Ayumi and her young nephew Hiro can Bowie discover the secret to defeating the Kaiju? And who is the mysterious time traveler Ako-X? Tune in to Strife on Mars to find out!"[23]

In the book *Memes in Digital Culture*, Limor Shifman makes an important observation by drawing attention to the relationship between memes and genres: "Defined as 'socially recognized types of communicative action,' genres share not only structures and stylistic features, but also themes, topics, and intended audiences."[24] Science fiction as a genre that crosses media—film, television, novels, video games, music—could, under this model, be understood as a memetic structure with active replicator power that reproduces and spreads the smaller meme units contained within it (iconography, character types, and narrative conventions) across media to form new expressions of science fiction. Like a contagion, the science-fiction memes evolve and expand. An example of this evolution is found in the way Bowie reappropriated and transformed science-fiction memes in his own creative output. According to Ryan M. Milner, through reappropriation memes can develop a dense and vibrant complexity that is reliant on intertextual connections. Reappropriation, he argues, "is essential to memetic media. Memes spread by weaving novel texts into existing contexts, blurring the old and the new . . . completely" in the process of "cultural creation."[25] The intertextual weaving of science fiction into Bowie and Bowie into science fiction evolved to a point at which he became his own meme genre: the memetic complex that is Bowie science fictionality.

There are numerous examples of distinctive meme-units within Bowie's creative output that spread intertextually beyond their original texts. For example, the Major Tom meme that first appeared in "Space Oddity" as a more distinctive trope of science fiction was later appropriated and repeated in the songs "Ashes to Ashes" (1980) and "Hallo Spaceboy" (1995), as well as in the music video for "Slow Burn" (2002), which includes an astronaut.[26] The music video for "Blackstar" (2015)—a song on the album of the same name—is perhaps the most haunting.[27] In the video, with knowledge of his approaching death, Bowie returns to the iconic figure of Major Tom. The video begins with a series of close-ups of an astronaut's body—presumably the dead body of Major Tom—and, as the camera pulls out, it reveals the body in its space suit lying

23 The poster even includes reference to "original [i.e., fictitious] Bowie songs" that are on the soundtrack. See "Strife on Mars," http://www.gogopicnic.com/strife-on-mars/.

24 Limor Shifman, *Memes in Digital Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014), 99.

25 Ryan M. Milner, *The World Made Meme: Public Conversations and Participatory Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016), 26.

26 Similarly, Ziggy Stardust makes appearances beyond *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* album, including in the music video for "Little Wonder" (1997).

27 The title refers to the Elvis Presley song "Black Star" from the film *Flaming Star* (Don Siegel, 1960).

on the craggy surface of a planet with a sun eclipsed by a moon in the distance.[28] Here, the meme of Major Tom from "Space Oddity" is repeated. Despite the figure of Major Tom drifting into space, Major Tom and "Space Oddity" were both—as memes—symbolic of the rise of Bowie's stardom. Both the character and the song were repeated and evolved in different contexts, helping solidify Bowie science fictionality. In its appearance in "Blackstar," however, the presence of the Major Tom meme is both a return to beginnings and a meme evolution that speaks to endings—the end of this character but, more significant, the end of the life of David Bowie, who was the transmitter of science-fiction memes throughout his life. As Bowie's voice enters the scene and accompanies the vision of the solitary astronaut lying on the desolate planet, another memetic signifier is simultaneously visible—this time it is one of science-fiction beginnings. The theatrical cutouts of the rocky landscapes repeat and reimagine the theatrical flats of the sets used in Georges Méliès's *A Trip to the Moon* (1902), considered the first science-fiction film. But rather than being met by savage moon-aliens, the skull of Major Tom—whose bone is encrusted with jewels—is discovered and retrieved by an alien woman who possesses a tail. The figure of Bowie appears, his eyes and head wrapped with bandages, the eyes replaced by buttons (the image recurs in the music video for "Lazarus" on the same album). The bandages and eye buttons repeat and evolve another meme from *La jetée*—the man with the bandaged face wearing surgical loupe glasses, but here the loupe is replaced with buttons. As Bowie sings of the death of the man, the occupants of the alien city (the Ormen mentioned in the song?) dance in reverie around the bejeweled skull while the astronaut's skeleton is seen floating into space toward the eclipse. Halfway through, the music shifts, adopting a hopeful, reverential tone further emphasized by the introduction of organ sounds. Bowie appears again, without the bandages, holding a book with a black star on its cover. Adopting a preacher stance, he sings: "Something happened on the day he died. Spirit rose a meter then stepped aside. Somebody else took his place, and bravely cried, 'I'm a blackstar, I'm a star's star, I'm a blackstar.'" As the old star dies, a new one is born. This song and its music video are Bowie's heart-wrenching farewell to himself as star.

Although the man has gone, his creations have continued to make their presence felt. Bowie created a complex memetic universe that projected to the world the powerful signifying system that is David Bowie, and a small percentage of this system was the memetic structure associated specifically with Bowie's science fictionality. This science fictionality has spread beyond Bowie's creative output and infectiously entered other science-fiction screen media, finding new meme vehicles. Rather than Bowie appropriating the memes of science fiction and, later, his own science fictionness,

28 The identity of the astronaut as Major Tom has been suggested by fans and numerous media reviewers of the video. The director of the music video, Johan Renck, neither denied nor confirmed the connection. When asked in an interview, "Is it Major Tom, and is this the confirmed death of that character?" Renck replied: "Most things like this are for the eyes of the beholder, you know? You make of it whatever you want. What I *can* say, on one side of things there is no deliberate, underlying, firm quest to have any references to past times. On the *other* side of things, a lot of these ideas have been conglomerative of David and I chatting. David sent me drawings and I sent him shit back, we'd been bouncing things like that." In this reading, the eye of this beholder understands the astronaut to be Major Tom. See Justin Joffe, "Behind 'Blackstar': An Interview with Johan Renck, the Director of David Bowie's Ten-Minute Short Film," *Noisey*, November 20, 2015, https://noisey.vice.com/en_us/article/6x87yj/david-bowie-blackstar-video-johan-renck-director-interview.

science-fiction media have come to embrace Bowie as science fiction. The memetic complex of Bowie science fictionality has infiltrated science fiction.

The television series *Doctor Who*, for example, has frequently incorporated Bowie science fictionality into its own structure. Answering the question posed in Bowie's song "Life on Mars"— "Is there life on Mars?"—the *Doctor Who* episode "The Waters of Mars" is set on planet Mars's first human base, which happens to be called "Bowie Base One."[29] Likewise, Peter Capaldi, the Twelfth Doctor, discussed the influence of Bowie's Thin White Duke period on his Time Lord look, stating: "He's [the Doctor] woven the future from the cloth of the past. Simple, stark and back to basics. No frills, no scarf, no messing, just 100 per cent Rebel Time Lord."[30] In the "Eleventh Doctor" *Doctor Who* comic series, a Bowie-inspired alien named John Jones appears as the Doctor's companion.[31] Like Ziggy, he is an alien who became a pop sensation on Earth. The fan wiki explains:

> The character of Jones was inspired by real-life musician David Bowie. Bowie's birth name was David Jones. The title of his album Abanazar's Madness is an antonymization of Bowie's *Aladdin Sane*, and the covers of the albums both feature the respective artist with red hair, closed eyes and paint on the face. Similarly, the aliases as the chameleon of pop, the Tall Pale Earl and Xavi Moonburst are similar to Bowie's aliases and characters as the chameleon of rock, the Thin White Duke and Ziggy Stardust, respectively.[32]

Continuing the association of Bowie and science fiction, the popular sci-fi and fantasy role-playing game *EarthBound* (Nintendo, 1994), which was designed by Shigesato Itoi (a Bowie fan), included the characters "the Starmen" and "Diamond Dog"—a boss that must be defeated in the final stage of the game.[33] Even more amusing is the fact that in *EquestriaBound*, the *My Little Pony* hack of *EarthBound*, Dinky, Apple Bloom, Sweetie Belle, and Scootaloo must also defend their land against the Diamond Dog.[34]

Bowie has inspired many writers and artists in the world of comics and cartoons. A few examples of his memetic reach include Neil Gaiman's Lucifer in the *Sandman* series (Vertigo, 1989–1996); Luci, the female Bowie-like character in *The Wicked and the Divine* (Image Comics, 2014–); Mikaal Toma—aka "Starman"—in the *Starman* series (*Starman* 12, DC Comics, 1976); and writer Kieron Gillen's version of Noh-Varr, the Kree alien from the *Young Avengers* (Marvel Comics, 2005–2014). The fourth season

29 *Doctor Who*, "The Waters of Mars," season 4, episode 16, aired on November 15, 2009 (BBC).

30 David Renshaw, "Peter Capaldi 'Bases Doctor Who Look on David Bowie,'" *NME*, June 30, 2014, http://www.nme.com/news/tv/peter-capaldi-bases-doctor-who-look-on-david-bowie-874668.

31 *Titan Comics*, Year One, 2015.

32 See "John Jones," *Doctor Who Wiki*, http://tardis.wikia.com/wiki/John_Jones.

33 For further information about the game, see "Mother 2," http://starmen.net/mother2/. On the fan-gamer site for *EarthBound*, some of the fans discuss references to David Bowie and are appalled when one of them admits to not knowing who David Bowie is: legotrekker is promptly directed to some links and dbl0sevenboy quotes lines from "Space Oddity." See "Earthbound: Mother 2," https://secure.fangamer.com/forum/Games/Mother2/David-Bowie-References.

34 See "EquestriaBound: My Little Pony Earthbound Conversion," https://forum.starmen.net/forum/Community/PKHack/EquestriaBound.

of the science-fiction cartoon *The Venture Bros.* (Adult Swim, 2003–2010) included the character the Sovereign, who was believed to be David Bowie until it was revealed he was a shape-shifter.

Even video games have tapped into the memetic complex of David Bowie's science fictionality. The popular *Metal Gear Solid* (Konami, 1998–) video games are littered with Bowie references. In *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater* (Konami, 2004), the character Major Zero also has the code name Major Tom, and at one point in the game, Major Tom uses the codec to call the game's major character Snake. Snake's response is "Can you hear me, Major Tom?"—a direct quote from "Space Oddity." Again, in *Metal Gear Solid 5: The Phantom Pain* (Konami, 2015), the character Big Boss has a wolf companion named Diamond Dog (Diamond Dogs is also the name of the military company they belong to). Both Big Boss and Diamond Dog wear an eye patch—a reference to the character Snake Plissken (Kurt Russell) from the dystopian science-fiction film *Escape from New York* (John Carpenter, 1981), which inspired the *Metal Gear Solid* games. However, here the reference is further loaded with Bowie's Halloween Jack persona from the equally dystopian science-fiction *Diamond Dogs* album and concerts.

Great science fiction has the capacity to have an impact on and shape reality, and Bowie as replicator of his own brand of science fiction is no exception. His memetic power has also infiltrated the world of science fact. In 2008, in an homage to Bowie, the German arachnologist Peter Jäger renamed a species of the huntsman spider *Heteropoda davidbowie*. Ziggy's band the Spiders from Mars possibly inspired the decision, as did the Ziggy Stardust–like red "hair" that runs across the spider's body.[35] In 2013, as a tribute to David Bowie, astronaut commander Chris Hadfield covered a video version of "Space Oddity," playing his guitar and singing while floating aboard the International Space Station; the video was uploaded to YouTube, where it was seen by more than twenty-five million viewers. Where in 1969 Bowie sang a song about an astronaut who was on a mission in space, in 2013 an astronaut sang Bowie's song that had inspired him to become an astronaut so he could go on a mission to space.[36] Finally, on January 5, 2015, an asteroid was named "342843 Davidbowie," and on January 13, 2016, Belgian astronomers at MIRA Public Observatory created a "'Bowie asterism' of seven stars which had been in the vicinity of Mars at the time of Bowie's death; the 'constellation' forms the lightning bolt on Bowie's face from the cover of his *Aladdin Sane* album."[37] David Bowie—the man with a passion for science fiction—spread his memetic power into the universe, and finally became a Starman. ✻

35 See "Heteropoda davidbowie Jäger, 2008," http://wsc.nmbe.ch/species/34569/Heteropoda_davidbowie; and "David Bowie Spider (*Heteropoda davidbowie*)," http://www.arkive.org/david-bowie-spider/heteropoda-davidbowie/. Also see P. Jäger, "Revision of the Huntsman Spider Genus Heteropoda Latreille 1804: Species with Exceptional Male Palpal Conformations from Southeast Asia and Australia (Arachnida: Araneae: Sparassidae: Heteropodinae)," *Senckenbergiana Biologica* 88 (2008): 239–310.

36 Andrew Stephens, "David Bowie and the Song That Was Heard in Outer Space," *Sydney Morning Herald*, July 3, 2015, http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/david-bowie-and-the-song-that-was-heard-in-outer-space-20150623-ghuue8.html.

37 The asteroid was originally discovered on December 21, 2008, by F. Hormuth at the Calar Alto Observatory in Spain. See Chris Spears, "It's No 'Space Oddity': Mile-Wide David Bowie Asteroid to Forever Float in Outer Space," *CBS Denver*, January 11, 2016. See also Daniel Kreps, "Belgian Astronomers Pay Tribute to David Bowie with New Constellation," *Rolling Stone*, January 16, 2016.

David Bowie: In Cameo

by Sean Redmond

In this essay I explore three film and television fiction cameo roles that David Bowie has performed in. Bowie brings the complexity of his shifting star image to each cameo performance, drawing on competing and sometimes conjoining artistic traditions as he does so. The parameters of posing and mimicry, self-reflexivity and cultish subversion, and the shifting ground of modernism and postmodernism show how Bowie's cameo performances are not singular or consistent but rather refer to the specificities of the text in question, the other authors and actors involved, and the multifaceted nature of his star self. When Bowie embodies a cameo role, a series of intersecting star and performance registers are in play that suggest that he is always *in cameo*.

The three texts that I have chosen to analyze are *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* (David Lynch, 1992), *Zoolander* (Ben Stiller, 2001), and *Extras* (Ricky Gervais, BBC, 2006).[1] These texts occur across film and television, as well as artistic and commercial streams, and they take place over a twenty-year performance period, allowing one to see how Bowie embodies and breaks down the very constituents of the cameo role. I predominantly refer to those texts where David Bowie appears as David Bowie, the exception being *Twin Peaks*, where he takes on the "disappearing" role of FBI agent Phillip Jeffries. These texts also address the various plateaus of Bowie's star image, as each draws on different and competing moments from his career.

The questions that frame this reading of the cameo performances are, Which David Bowie is being brought into view? How is the text using him, and why? I look at each text in chronological order, both to narrate the cameo in relation to the perceived notion of the artist's career progression and to build sedimentary layers of analysis: one cameo builds on the previous one, and yet calls it forth, in the same way Bowie's star images linger on. The shape-shifting David Bowie ultimately complements, and in part resides in, the floating landscapes of his (always in play) cameo performances.

***Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me*: A Disappearing Cameo.** David Bowie's cameo in *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* occurs near the start of the film. The scene begins with an establishing shot of the cracked Liberty Bell, followed by a cut to an interior shot, where FBI agent

1 "The David Bowie Episode," *Extras*, aired September 21, 2006 (BBC).

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Dale Cooper (Kyle MacLachlan) enters the office where he works and says to agent Gordon Cole (David Lynch): "It is 10:10 a.m. on February sixteenth. I was worried about today because of the dream I told you about." The importance of time and temporality, and the distinction between real and dream, are immediately signified, a trope of the *Twin Peaks* series to which the film is a prequel, and one that is shortly to be connected to Bowie's (dis)appearance in the film. The cracked Liberty Bell is now a mere museum piece, and the watch that Cole looks at as Cooper speaks to him seems an absurdist temporal gesture, perhaps borrowed from the figure of the Hatter, as if time has to be constantly checked and monitored.[2] As the exchange unfolds, there is a pregnant pause between the two men, as if they were both frozen in time. The abrupt cut that follows their conversation into a long corridor, where Cooper then appears, is momentarily discontinuous. Cooper then stands and stares into a mounted surveillance camera (stationed at the near end of the long corridor) before entering a nondescript "control room" with a bank of monitors. A series of brief shots then shows Cooper looking into the eye of the surveillance camera and at the monitors that display a live feed of the corridor. Cooper is observer and observed, seemingly puzzled, or put out by the fact that he cannot see himself being watched or surveilled. He seems surprised that he cannot exist on the screen and in the control room or corridor at the same time. Time is rendered "out of joint," and the spaces he occupies are a "nonplace," inhabited but not lived in.[3] Cooper is very much experiencing time and space in the age of postmodernity.

It is at this schismatic moment in the scene that "David Bowie" (dis)appears. A lift door opens, and the camera dwells on the space where someone (who?) should exit but does not. The camera cuts back to Cooper entering the long corridor to again look into the eye of the surveillance camera, before again cutting to the lift, where David Bowie exits, dressed in a powder-blue suit and loose-fitting flowery shirt. He proceeds to walk down the long corridor toward Cooper. In one sense, this is a classically coded star cameo entrance, the delay a device to build suspense before the blissful surprise. However, Bowie's entrance is incongruous—he doesn't fit in with these dour surroundings—and this otherness fosters estrangement and detachment. In another sense, then, this is a Lynchian film setting up a modernist entrance for what is here signified as a modernist version of David Bowie.

Cooper proceeds to enter the control room to impossibly see himself in the live feed as David Bowie walks past him. The temporal, technological, and spatial dislocation of these cuts suggest present time and time past, and the presence of time and of time passing, capturing the very conditions of film or cinema's relation to modernism—and to social life, in which "individuals might experience and re-experience the temporal dislocations of modernity."[4] Bowie's appearance also further disrupts

2 Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865; Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2011).

3 Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International* (London: Routledge, 2012); Marc Augé, *Non-Places: An Introduction to Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe (London: Verso, 1995), 122.

4 Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

narrative continuity: Is this a flash-forward, a fragment or figment from Agent Cooper's dream(ing), or a ghost walking in plain sight?

One could also read this hauntology as postmodernity's present yearning for "modernism's past" and for a simultaneous repositioning of Bowie before he became a postmodern star—his powder-blue suit, loud shirt, and blond hair "ironic" signifiers from and of his *Let's Dance* era.[5] Of course, the sense that David Bowie is there and not there, both an embodied being and an apparition, is not only part of the shifting grounds of the modernist or postmodernist aesthetic in the film but also the cornerstone of his idealized rock-star image. Bowie is both out of this world and a part of it.[6]

At this point of rupture in the film, David Bowie *is* David Bowie in cameo: an as-yet-unnamed character bringing his own fractured and polysemic identity to the scene.[7] Cooper can't quite believe that David Bowie has just walked into the FBI building, and the shock that he expresses compounds or compresses the estrangement techniques that the film is so far built on. There is a high degree of "profane illumination" as the diegetic world of the film begins to disintegrate and disorientate the viewing position offered.[8] Ernest Mathijs suggests:

> Like star personae, cameos therefore add pleasurably intertextual and reflexive dimensions to a movie. A cameo stands out as a punctuated moment because of the extratextual connotations it produces but also because of its role within the narrative. It is often an odd moment, hanging in time, pausing the progress of the story and inviting the viewer to ponder some tangential implications of the story's consequences.[9]

There are obviously added complications here, however, because Bowie's star image is already a "punctuated" one, constantly in reinvention and renegotiation, so his presence is doubly disruptive to the film narrative. This reflexive division enables *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* to operate from a modernist agenda, encapsulating a brooding sense of *Verfremdungseffekte*, or "distancing effect."[10] While Bowie's cameo appearance is "shocking" and alienating, he (and the film) is also thick with what I playfully call a "present and absent illumination": Bowie's star image already effortlessly and endlessly walks in a postmodern cameo limbo.

The scene continues with David Bowie entering the room that Agent Cole is in, but he is given a character's name, "the long-lost Phillip Jeffries," a top FBI agent who

5 Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures* (London: Zero Books, 2014).

6 Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* (London: Routledge, 2014).

7 Philip Auslander, *Performing Glam Rock: Gender and Theatricality in Popular Music* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006).

8 Walter Benjamin, "Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia," *New Left Review* 108 (1978): 47.

9 Ernest Mathijs, "Cronenberg Connected: Cameo Acting, Cult Stardom and Supertexts," in *Cult Film Stardom: Offbeat Attractions and Processes of Cultification,* ed. Kate Egan and Sarah Thomas (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 144–162.

10 Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. and trans. John Willett (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014).

has been missing for two years. The thematic concerns of the scene shift; it comes to have as much to do with surrealist dream and shattered memory as with temporality and spatial (non)relations. The atonal, fractious sound design, the subversion of the room's spatial axis through editing mismatches, and the intermittent blue tinting or pixelation of the screen, creates a mise-en-scène of unease. As Jeffries enters the room, obviously traumatized, he stutters in a high-pitched Southern drawl that is at the same time tinged with Bowie's own recognizable tones, "Well, now, I'm not going to talk about Judy. In fact, we are not going to talk about Judy, we are going to keep her out of this. . . . [W]ho do you think this is, there?" (pointing at Agent Cooper, who has followed him into the office). Bowie's highly affected, slipping accent for the character, the absurdist naming of Judy, and his exaggerated performance manner (delivered as a sharp contrast to the other actors) seem to be self-conscious, drawing attention "to the artificiality of acting itself."[11] He (the film) foregrounds the very act of cameo acting, which in turn demands a degree of "subcultural capital" on behalf of the viewer asked to recognize the allusions and elisions on show.[12] The sense that the scene is directly addressing the knowing viewer is compounded by the ongoing role that David Lynch plays—an "authorial" performance—actively directing the scenes in question. *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me*, then, blurs dream and real not just within its own textual operations but also in and through Bowie's cameo role.[13] Of course, the artifice in plain sight isn't simply acting but stardom itself and the star images out of which Bowie has built his career.

When Jeffries shouts, "We live inside a dream!," and viewers then bear witness to his fragmented, tortured memories (or are they dreams?), the Man from Another Place, Killer Bob, Mrs. Chalfont, and her grandson are situated in a montage sequence that fans of *Twin Peaks* will immediately recognize and seek to make coherent meaning out of. Pivotal to this dream sequence is the mask: the grandson is wearing one and lifts it to reveal the face of a monkey. This a Lynchian trope, "a belief in a multifarious reality, in deep truths concealed by facades," but it also speaks to Bowie's own series of masks and facades that he had taken on during his career.[14] When we witness Jeffries/Bowie suffer an agonizing scream in or through the montage sequence, we are seeing the interiorized scream that stardom's artificiality produces and that may lie within the (his) fractured psyche. The scene concludes by "having Jeffries vanish amidst more blue static and a shot of power lines against a blue sky."[15] The question emerges: Was he really there? This is shortly confirmed by Cooper's replaying of the surveillance footage in the control room to prove that he was. Or was he? And who is "he"? Is he the enigma of David Bowie or the disappearing Agent Jeffries? Presence and absence,

11 Ernest Mathijs and Jamie Sexton, *Cult Cinema: An Introduction* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 83–84.

12 Mark Jancovich, "Cult Fictions: Cult Movies, Subcultural Capital, and the Production of Cultural Distinctions," *Cultural Studies* 16, no. 2 (2002): 306–322.

13 Mathijs, "Cronenberg Connected," in *Cult Film Stardom: Offbeat Attractions and Processes of Cultification,* ed. Kate Egan and Sarah Thomas (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 144–162.

14 Greg Olson, *David Lynch: Beautiful Dark* (Toronto: Scarecrow Press, 2008), 385.

15 Ibid.

star and cameo, dream and reality, modern and postmodern disintegrate in *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me*.

The idea of disappearance was pivotal to David Bowie's career at this time: he had sought to leave behind the sugary, commercially driven star image he had utilized during the 1980s to be part of, or subsumed by, the grungy band *Tin Machine*, in rehearsal when the film was being shot.[16] His presence and nonpresence in the film are already imbued in and through the cameo performance he gives. In the dialogue from the scene quoted earlier, we can read the strange tense shift from "Who do you think this is, there?" as David Bowie (and Lynch) drawing attention to his (their) performance; they are breaking the fourth wall, playing to the gallery, as he/they disappear in and out of view.

***Zoolander*: Strike a Pose.** *Zoolander* is full of ironic, knowing cameo appearances. Its satire of the fashion industry also extends to the starry roles that celebrities are often asked to take to add commercial weight to a film and to sanctify the importance of their fame at the time of the film's release. In *Zoolander* we see cameos from such diverse figures as Donald and Melania Trump, Victoria Beckham, Tommy Hilfiger, Lenny Kravitz, Gwen Stefani, Heidi Klum, Paris Hilton, Lil' Kim, Garry Shandling, Stephen Dorff, Sandra Bernhard, Claudia Schiffer, Lukas Haas, Carmen Kass, Frankie Rayder, Karl Lagerfeld, Billy Zane, and Donatella Versace. These cameos are taken from across the fashion, sports, music, film, and television entertainment industries and work in at least three ways: as satire and irony, as confirmation of the star's or celebrity's place in popular culture at the time, and to add commercial "value" or audience appeal to the film. *Zoolander* thus vexingly works in opposition to and yet in support of the cameo performance, the star industries, and the set of intertextual commodities it sets in train. With specific regard to David Bowie, who marshals and adjudicates the "walk off" battle between the two supreme male fashion models, Derek Zoolander (Ben Stiller) and Hansel McDonald (Owen Wilson), the cameo both ironizes Bowie's star image and eroticizes the 1980s "Bowie" it references. Ultimately, the cameo draws on posing and the art of the poseur embodied in Bowie's various star images.

The fashion walk-off challenge to determine the best runway model takes place in an industrial warehouse. Unlike many of the other "backdrop" or come-and-see cameo performances in the film, David Bowie introduces himself, volunteering his "service" to declare the winner once the battle has finished. Dressed in a black suit, white shirt done up, and wearing dark shades, which he immediately pulls away from his eyes, he emerges as a "supericon" and a fully formed poseur.[17] The chorus line and notes of the 1983 track "Let's Dance" herald his arrival on screen, as does the title, "David Bowie," written in lettering taken from the *Let's Dance* album.

There is a complex series of significations in play here: as Bowie removes his shades, he is again referring to the notion of mask and authenticity (and his clothes allude to

16 Patrick MacDonald, "Beaming Bowie Excited about Current Direction of his Life, Music," *Seattle Times*, December 20, 1991, 12.

17 Lauren Berlant, "The Face of America and the State of Emergency," in *Disciplinarity and Dissent in Cultural Studies*, ed. Cary Nelson (London: Routledge, 1996), 397–439.

the FBI garb worn by Cooper and Gordon in *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me*). The use of the *Let's Dance* signatures places Bowie at the peak of his commercial success, particularly in America, and so there is a nostalgic looking backward to an earlier time both textually and extratextually for audience members who recall the record's release. Bowie's cameo in *Zoolander* connects him to contemporary fashion culture (in 2004, he and Iman would endorse Tommy Hilfiger, who also appears in the film). Of course, Bowie's various star images are not only fashion conscious; they are connected to the work of often radical fashion designers.

However, it is the way that Bowie is employed as a poseur in the scene that particularly embodies this cameo performance. According to Judith A. Peraino:

> Posing . . . insists on self-awareness, image, and surface and keeps in place the temporal and material positions of "original" and "copy," and . . . functions within an interaction among creator, spectator, and the object of the gaze—an interaction that is already saturated with implications of power and desire. Importantly, to "strike a pose" is to stop the action of the body, to allow the viewer to become absorbed in visual pleasure and desire, and also to allow the poser the pleasure of inhabiting the object position.[18]

In one sense, *Zoolander* seems to work against the grain of this definition: the posing that Zoolander and Hansel engage in is meant to turn it into comedic simulacra, whereas Bowie's mostly nonchalant disinterest (as he sits on his "throne") is empowered but constantly undercut by the parodic excesses of the walk-off. And yet Bowie's own star signification is in part built on striking poses, being a poseur, from one embodied image to another, whether it be Major Tom or the Thin White Duke. As he sits on the throne he is powerful and desirable, and his relative stillness and composure enable him to be the object of the gaze. He in fact resembles or calls forth the iconography of the "Cracked Actor" from *Aladdin Sane*.

David Bowie as poseur has served two functions. The first is to embody, validate, and transubstantiate the "pose of the queer," something he explicitly does, for example, in the video to "Boys Keep Swinging" (1979). Bowie's posing is a form of subcultural resistance; it has been predicated on gender and sexual subversion, opening up his pose to a nonbinary queer gaze. *Zoolander*, of course, is decidedly and deliciously a "camp text," and Bowie's kingdom is one of queenly excess.[19] The walk-off is all about excessive display, tongue-in-cheek allusions, and feminine undercutting of the heterosexually "masculine" fashion models.

The second function of the pose in *Zoolander* is to draw attention to its artificiality: its self-conscious qualities are a mirror onto the performance of the (star) self. As Peraino further suggests, "Posing calls attention to the temporal and material relationship between original and copy and to the apprehension of surface in contrast to the perception of depth. The poseur's superficiality represents an intense focus on

18 Judith A. Peraino, "Plumbing the Surface of Sound and Vision: David Bowie, Andy Warhol, and the Art of Posing," *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* 21, no. 1 (2012): 151–184.

19 Susan Sontag, "Notes on Camp," 1961, http://faculty.georgetown.edu/irvinem/theory/Sontag-NotesOnCamp-1964.html.

immediate conditions but as conditioned by key figures of the past."[20] Bowie is both original and copy here: an authentic, iconic choice for this part and a facsimile of his 1980s alter ego. Bowie's cameo performance is of the moment but also draws on his previous star images and his central role in posing, being a poseur. He is again perfect for this cameo not simply because of the matching fit between the role and his star image but because he is—at a meta level—a quite brilliant series of cameo poses.

If one can argue, as I have, that Bowie's cameo in *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* is both modernist and postmodernist (as is the film itself), then his performance in *Zoolander* is deliciously postmodern, as again is the film. Rather than seeing this as a shift in star signification, set in a new hyperreal cultural landscape, however, the Bowie cameo always occupies these simultaneous interstitial spaces. His malleability—his series of masks —enables him to exist or to pose in many cultural and artistic rooms.

***Extra* David Bowie.** David Bowie's cameo appearance in the highly self-reflexive sitcom *Extras* also centrally draws on the mask. The series, built around weekly cameo appearances by special guest stars, charts Andy Millman's (Ricky Gervais) desire to be a regarded actor and celebrity, but his own sitcom, *When the Whistle Blows*, has been rewritten by BBC producers to be a lowbrow ratings winner. Seeking refuge in a celebrity pub, and sitting in the VIP area, Andy strikes up a forlorn conversation with David Bowie, who immediately pens a song about Millman's predicament. Turning to a piano he is sitting next to, Bowie begins to write and sing "Little Fat Man (Chubby Little Loser)," starting with the line "little fat man who sold his dream."

The degree of self-reflexivity here is again acute: one can see Millman representing the Bowie who felt he sold out and lost his way in the 1980s. The challenge of fame and what it constitutes has been a recurring feature of Bowie's own oeuvre, so this is again a conscious double dialogue in play. The scene and song are played with a knowing authenticity in mind: we are seeing David Bowie as he really is, behind his star mask, a *cruel* singer-songwriter who is above ordinary people or fans. But the scene is also (obviously) heavily parodic and draws on the extratextual information we have about Bowie's love of subversive comedy: this is David Bowie *pretending* to be David Bowie for comedic effect.

Bowie draws on both the presumed skills of improvisation as he pens the song and the sing-along British pub tradition, as the other patrons in the bar are encouraged to join in with the chorus line: "He's banal and facile, he's a fat waste of space, see his pug-nose face. Pug, pug. Pug, pug." Millman wilts as the song builds, as David Bowie proves his star worth, and as he fully embodies the face-shifting cameo.

There is also a degree of modernism to this cameo performance: theatrical and aleatory codes are combined, and there are multiple audiences (Millman, the pub crowd, the viewers at home) in self-conscious and interactive relay. In *Extras*, then, particularly in relation to Bowie, "instead of treating performance as an outgrowth of an essential self, it implies that the self is an outgrowth of performance. 'Performance,' in turn, is understood in its broadest, most social sense, as the thing we do when we interact with the world—a concept embracing not only theater but public celebrity and

20 Peraino, "Plumbing the Surface," 173.

everyday life."[21] In a mock promo interview with David Bowie about his appearance in *Extras*, he lampoons his own artistic background and trajectory of performance registers, claiming that his "background is in serious acting before I started doing the writing and singing thing" and that "it was fun giving Rick pointers, maybe new ways in approaching comedy that he may not have thought about before." He ends the interview by sharing (terrible) jokes he passed to Gervais for use in future episodes of *Extras*, such as "If you keep looking like that, your face will stay like it." Of course, Bowie is pretending to be Ricky Gervais here—or the Gervais we see in the mockumentary series *The Office*, who can't reflect on his own failings or shortcomings. Bowie is pretending to be Gervais playing Gervais playing David Bowie as a cameo—a postmodern series of mirrors and reflections if ever there was one.

Extras was David Bowie's last television performance before his death in 2016, but the song he penned for the episode became the opening notes and melody for the melancholic, memorial single "Where Are We Now" (2013). Of course, it is also reminiscent of the anachronistic theatrical music-hall tracks that make up his first album, released by Deram in 1967.[22] "Where Are We Now" is a love song to the past, drawing on images and references to Bowie's own creative period in Berlin. He conjures up his own memorial framework, composed of lyrics that recall his time there in the late 1970s, such as "sitting in the Dschungel, on Nürnberger Straße," while the video to the song includes shots of the places where he lived or traveled through, such as Potsdamer Platz, and objects, curiosities, and mementos, such as mannequins, a snowflake, a crystal, empty glass bottles, and a giant ear—suggesting Bowie's own memorabilia. Both "Little Fat Man" and "Where Are We Now" allow David and us to experience the past in the present, one of the principles of technological modernism.[23] He appears as a cameo in his own past, both here and there, or absent and present, a condition that calls back to his role as Agent Jeffries in *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me*: "Who do you think this is, there?"

This is David Bowie, over there, always in minor key, a sign that is never fixed, a solid that is always liquid, a set of floating cameo images constantly taking on or over "David Bowie." This is modernism and postmodernism in interplay, entwined and unraveling, like a Lynchian plot, like a Zoolander pose, like a pale Gervais imitation. And what of David Jones, the man behind a sea of masks, where might we glimpse him, through what keyhole might he appear, if not endlessly in cameo?

The three David Bowie cameos analyzed in this essay demonstrate how his star image lends itself to pretense and to the modernity and postmodernity of film, star, and celebrity culture. Each cameo stands in its own right, but when taken together, they shine a critical light on how and why Bowie registers as a certain type of fluid star figure. ✻

21 James Naremore, "Film and the Performance Frame," *Film Quarterly* 38, no. 2 (1984): 8–15.

22 Will Brooker, *Forever Stardust: David Bowie across the Universe* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2017).

23 Doane, *Emergence of Cinematic Time*.

"Canvas of Flesh": David Bowie, Andy Warhol in *Basquiat*

by Toija Cinque

The artistic interests and the careers of David Bowie and Andy Warhol crossed numerous times. David Bowie was inspired by the pop art movement of the 1950s and 1960s. He was especially a fan of the idiosyncratic pop provocateur Andy Warhol—his art, his celebrity, and his "cinema" of intellect.[1] In 1971, Andy Warhol's play *Pork*, initially a sequence of tape recordings of gossipy telephone calls made in Warhol's studio years prior, was adapted and then directed by Anthony J. Ingrassia to be performed in London and New York. David Bowie attended the London shows. Soon afterward he set about hiring a number of those associated with the *Pork* production, including Cherry Vanilla (with whom he would have a relationship), Leee Black Childers, and Tony Zanetta.[2] He was keen to meet Andy, having written the song "Andy Warhol" in 1971 for his album of the same year, *Hunky Dory*, but he apparently did not encounter Warhol in London at the time but instead later at Warhol's Factory in the Decker Building, in Union Square West, New York City. This was, however, a particularly awkward meeting. It was captured, typically for Andy, on film, by Andrew Netter.

In the fifteen-minute film, Bowie is seen undertaking a mime performance wherein he enacts his own disemboweling as a screen test for Andy.[3] Warhol appears quite unimpressed. In the black-and-white footage, we first see Bowie's smooth face in close-up, his natural long tresses falling loosely, before the camera moves out. In a single long take Bowie mimes the extraction—from a pocket in his baggy, high-waisted trousers—of a pair of scissors, with which he cuts open his abdomen in order to pull his insides outward. He then, in mime, draws forth from his chest cavity his still-beating heart and clasps it momentarily in both hands to throw it to the air (to Andy?) before stitching himself back together. As the camera follows him, Bowie

1 Van M. Cagle, *Reconstructing Pop/Subculture: Art, Rock, and Andy Warhol* (London: Sage, 1995).

2 Wendy Leigh, *Bowie: The Biography* (New York: Gallery Books, 2015).

3 "David Bowie at the Factory," from a performance at the Factory on September 14, 1971, posted by "admin," July 10, 2017, https://davidbowienews.com/2017/07/13047/. Almost fourteen minutes of the film has been restored, albeit no sound remains; it is archived at the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

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moves to Andy and nervously orbits him as Andy dominates the space, oblivious to David's proclivity for affirmation.

This article sets David Bowie's intersecting relationship across time and place with Warhol as the bedrock for his performance as Andy Warhol in the 1996 film *Basquiat* (Julian Schnabel). I first present the provocation that for Bowie—who spent his early years establishing himself as a musician influenced by "the New York scene" but creatively and performatively employing his own metaphors for conveying the didactic—to later play the part of Andy Warhol draws the arc to a close of a long wish fulfillment. Bowie wanted to become recognized as the artist Andy was, to hold court as Andy did. Second, it is against this background that Bowie becomes the prime vehicle to play Andy. Imbued with his own essence of art-form fusions, vision, and sound, he depicts the dialectical tension between art and commerce, of genuine acts associated with risk and will. Bowie's star image performatively guides the viewer's attention to the actions of art dealers, especially Bruno Bischofberger, a person in *Basquiat* representationally depicted as the sycophantic "player" preying on upcoming artists. This works because, as director Julian Schnabel explains, using postmodern reasoning, the motivation for choosing David Bowie to play Andy Warhol was because he wanted a pop icon to play a pop icon. He wanted people to say, "Is that Andy Warhol playing David Bowie or David Bowie playing Andy Warhol?"[4]

David Bowie, Andy Warhol, Silver Screen. Throughout his career, David Bowie fueled his individual agency through artistic compositions using an exhibitionistic image, deliberation, and virtuosity in performance.[5] As an artistic subject he reveals the power of creativity through his own music and cinematic performance to offer a recognition of both shared and different human subjectivities. Here I distinguish "star" performance from "celebrity" persona using Nick Stevenson's distinction that "stars are popular figures that last" and "extra-ordinary" people to look up to, and P. David Marshall's explanation that while someone achieves stardom through a special textual performance such as acting in film or through music, celebrity speaks of a perceptual movement outside of the original cultural form, whether film or popular music.[6] Celebrity concerns itself with the dimensions of that person who performed and with how we use those dimensions in all sorts of other ways across popular culture.[7] The celebrity aspect is that we are concerned with the star's everyday life to the extent that he or she becomes a study of the private and the intimate but

4 "David Bowie and Julian Schnabel interview on 'Basquiat' (1996)," YouTube video, 51:27, from a guest interview televised by PBS on *Charlie Rose*, September 8, 1996, posted by "Manufacturing Intellect," July 18, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ExDfj-_D6Sk.

5 Helene Marie Thian, "David Bowie Is . . . Customizing," in *Enchanting David Bowie: Space/Time/Body/Memory*, ed. Toija Cinque, Christopher Moore, and Sean Redmond (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 231–250.

6 Nick Stevenson, *David Bowie, Fame, Sound and Vision* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2006), 2; P. David Marshall, personal interview with Toija Cinque, February 2, 2014, at Deakin University, Australia, https://video.deakin.edu.au/media/t/0_4ipkghee.

7 A more comprehensive unpacking of the layers of star theory, celebrity, and reality is beyond the scope of this brief essay, but see Su Holmes, "'Starring . . . Dyer?': Re-Visiting Star Studies and Contemporary Celebrity Culture," *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture* 2, no. 2 (2005): 6–21; and Sean Redmond and Su Holmes, eds., *Stardom and Celebrity: A Reader* (London: Sage, 2007).

in the most public way. Bowie emerged as someone who wanted to be the author of his own star image. He wanted to be seen as an "auteur," and through a kind of metonym of emotion he mobilized reaction and channeled affect into political action via his visual and sonic creativity.[8] Bowie's star image rests largely on his private *emotional* life as an interpretative framework for inner contemplation, simultaneously subverting the creative cultural industry from which he emerged. This confirms him as an empowering figure and "disruptive" agent whose work underscores the questions raised in the early intertextual work of Richard Dyer in *Stars*: that of the value of stars and their art as a "culture medium" that affords consideration of the identity of ourselves and others.[9] In this context individual identity is assembled, realized, or constructed through imagination.[10]

Some, such as British writer Philip Hoare or art critic David Bonetti, would have it that David Bowie playing Andy Warhol in *Basquiat* works not because the role is not an extension of Bowie's unreal personality but because it is about another character.[11] I make the contrary argument that David Bowie playing Andy Warhol unearths one of his prime motivating creative forces, whereby David Jones uses *David Bowie* to move on stardom's stage. Positioned in this way, David Jones resonates with and necessarily complicates David Bowie's performance as Warhol in *Basquiat*. That is, through the overarching "Bowie" (the actor's actor), the creative work becomes a metanarrative for life's grit as seen through the eyes of an artist. On June 5, 1973, in an interview for the BBC1 news program *Nationwide* (1969–1983), Bowie explained, "I am very much a character when I'm onstage. . . . [T]hat's what 'Bowie' is supposed to be about."[12] By being Warhol in *Basquiat*, however, Bowie ruptures his own claim, because he was in fact closing a personal loop for David Jones by tapping into the popular artistic figure of Warhol, whose own work had provided a vehicle for thinking through much of his own existentially driven creative approach to music and art.[13] The Bowie-Warhol nexus also gently reflects Basquiat's yearning requests for help from Warhol in the film. In his own words, Bowie stated that his portrayal was an "impersonation" because he never really knew Warhol—albeit he did see him everywhere in New York in the late 1970s and early 1980s—and he approached the role by registering what Andy's spirit was.[14] Bowie portrays Warhol in contrast to his clichéd constructed media persona of being false, flat, and emotionally cool. In dramatic scenes where the theme and intent are friendship,

8 On agency and the star image of Drew Barrymore, see Rebecca Williams, "From beyond Control to in Control: Investigating Drew Barrymore's Feminist Agency/Authorship," in *Stardom and Celebrity: A Reader*, ed. Sean Redmond and Su Holmes (London: Sage, 2007), 111–125.

9 Richard Dyer, *Stars* (1979; London: BFI Publishing, 1998).

10 Toija Cinque, "Digital Shimmer: Popular Music and the Intimate Nexus between Fan and Star," in *Companion to Celebrity (Studies)*, ed. P. David Marshall and Sean Redmond (Boston: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016) 440–456.

11 Philip Hoare, "David Bowie Then . . . David Bowie Now," in *David Bowie Is the Subject*, ed. Victoria Broackes and Geoffrey Marsh (London: V&A Publishing, 2013), 283; David Bonetti, "'Basquiat' Trivializes Talented Painter's Life," August 16, 1996, *SFGate*, http://www.sfgate.com/news/article/Basquiat-trivializes-talented-painter-s-life-3128604.php.

12 British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), *Nationwide*, news program (June 5, 1973).

13 Toija Cinque, Christopher Moore, and Sean Redmond, eds., *Enchanting David Bowie: Space/Time/Body/Memory* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015).

14 Bowie, "David Bowie and Julian Schnabel interview."

scenes that require an empathetic character, Bowie appears to build from inside, that is, from an internalized backstory and from vulnerabilities and dyadic reactions.

Bowie looked at Warhol as someone who had little knowledge of or care for the art world while being simultaneously immersed in it.[15] He infused that thinking with his own broad interest in plastic arts and the material values of playing an instrument or painting. Moreover, Bowie was simultaneously aligned with the New York art "scene," a world made up of the people who regard art. This includes those that produce it and those who buy and sell it. Some collect and display art, and others promote it, or regulate it, or rail against it in varying ways and with varying degrees of passion. Yet others think and offer ideological critique. In an interview with award-winning journalist Charlie Rose, David Bowie—in conversation with Julian Schnabel about the making of the film—asserted his considered views on how the established art world operates, strategically making certain artists unavailable aesthetically to a low art market, and thus increasing the value of their work:

> I think the great fight is that for the established art world, it is fundamental that the mystery is kept in place because once it falls into the hands of the proletariat—that the ability to make art is in-fact inherent in all of us—it demolishes the idea of art for commerce and that's no good for business. So I think that there is always a great coming together of the commerce establishment, which the art world is, to protect its own.[16]

Like Warhol and Basquiat both, Bowie manipulated (then) contemporary signs, becoming a product of the attitude toward both commodification and art. As I have elsewhere argued, David Bowie's work overtly challenged the theory of "authenticity."[17] Pop art simultaneously expanded on and negated the ideals of Dadaism (1915–1920s) while employing aspects of mass culture, including advertising, and everyday cultural objects and images (e.g., road signs, comic books, product packaging, company logos) with an agenda to collapse the distinctions between elite and mass cultural realms.[18] It is equally the case that David Bowie has frequently been disingenuous, and his lyrics have been ironic, if not ostensibly absurd. What Warhol did was to draw aesthetic lessons from mass culture while seeking to work within commercial media, with the result that through the subject matter he chose and the way "he" made "his" art, the commercial and replicable art (as a commodity) was therefore acceptable. Warhol demonstrated that good art sells, thus establishing what Bowie has described as the "new religion of the consumer imagism."[19] To this extent, then, the distinction between Andy Warhol and David Bowie collapses in the film, and the metalyptic slippage of Bowie playing Warhol in the film utilizes their respective self-constructed celebrity as a comment on the nature of the art world and a way to emphasize the

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

17 Toija Cinque, "Semantic Shock: David Bowie," in *Enchanting David Bowie: Space/Time/Body/Memory*, ed. Toija Cinque, Christopher Moore, and Sean Redmond (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 197–214.

18 Sylvia Harrison, *Pop Art and the Origins of Post-Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

19 Bowie, "David Bowie and Julian Schnabel interview."

tensions and linkages in the friendship between Basquiat and Warhol, as portrayed in the film. Drawing on this thread, David Bowie embodies the symbolic complexities of art and culture in critically important aural and visual ways, and his representation of Warhol generates specific narrative forms, as the art world sensibilities are an obstacle to be overcome toward artistic acceptance and success.

For his part, Bowie in the late 1960s and early 1970s was a musician who conveyed the issues of his generation. When he sang "Space Oddity" (*Space Oddity*, 1969) he presented lyrics of courage and going into the unknown that reflected upon (British) society at the time—the cusp of a new era and a time of ideological contestation, change, and contradiction. Indicative here is the notion of the *mise en abyme*, or what Lucien Dällenbach calls "the mirror in the text," a representation of a representation.[20] In 1994, Bowie—himself a painter, sculptor, and exhibitor of his art works—also became a member of, and interviewer for, *Modern Painter*. As well as through his music, Bowie has commented critically on established precepts embedded in the "high" arts in his own controversial art works (his 1994 commissioned design for Laura Ashley wallpaper ironically depicted the naked body of British figurative painter Lucian Freud, and was part of his original series *British Conflicts Series No., 2—Art and Conflict*).[21] Contentiously, he once played a cheeky public hoax on respected London galleries; as Nicholas Pegg recounts:

> April 1998 saw one of the more eccentric episodes in David's relationship with the art world when he was revealed as one of the perpetrators of an elaborate hoax: William Boyd's monograph on the life of Nat Tate, an obscure artist who had committed suicide in 1960, was published by 21 [Bowie's own fine-arts publishing company from 1997] in a handsome edition with forewords by noted names in modern art. At an official launch several respected art critics made fools of themselves by sounding off about Nat Tate's life and work, but it didn't take long for someone to notice that the artist's name was blatantly concocted from "National" and "Tate," London's two biggest art galleries. Nat Tate was not merely an April Fool joke but a cutting exposure of the fragile web of reputation and credibility that holds the art world together.[22]

Bowie was embedded in the fine arts, for the album title *1. Outside* (1995) shows his understanding of outsider art (or rough art): a term put forward by French artist Jean Dubuffet to describe art that had been created by those on the outside of the boundaries of official culture, and specifically, art made by those on the outside of the established art scene, such as insane-asylum inmates and children.[23] Bowie has said that the "fragmentation of society" is an enduring interest that he has never moved

20 Lucien Dällenbach, *The Mirror in the Text*, by (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 8, 17–18.

21 The segment of Laura Ashley wallpaper features a repeat print of Bowie's portrait of artist Lucian Freud, OM (1922–2011). Freud's artistic task was not to flatter. Indeed, his images, many of them highly detailed nudes, were frank, if not stark, with few precedents in the art of the human form. Bowie's impression of Freud was originally included in a limited-edition box made available at the War Child fashion event Pagan Fun Wear, held at London's Saatchi Gallery, on Midsummer's Eve 1995.

22 Nicholas Pegg, *The Complete David Bowie*, 6th ed. (London: Titan Books, 2001), 645.

23 Roger Cardinal, *Outsider Art* (London: Studio Vista, 1972).

away from and that, in his view, art "shouldn't be institutionalized or put in galleries" because it is "for the public to use . . . sustenance to life."[24]

The Kid Who Used the Name "Samo." *Basquiat* is a biographical film about the artist Jean-Michel Basquiat, who began spray-painting graffiti on buildings in Lower Manhattan in the late 1970s using the tag "Samo." He would write cryptic messages on walls, and in his own recursive acts (his *mise en abyme*) he scavenged, appropriated, and recycled into his creative works printed popular television images, comic-book heroes, fragments from the Bible, and advertising slogans. With the assistance of international art dealer and gallerist Bruno Bischofberger (played by Dennis Hopper in the 1996 film), his work came to be exhibited alongside other leading exponents of the neo-expressionism movement flourishing in the 1980s such as Julian Schnabel, who also appears in the film as the fictional character; Albert Milo (Gary Oldman), and David Salle from the United States; Francesco Clemente and Enzo Cucchi from Italy; Anselm Kiefer and Georg Baselitz from Germany; and Czech artist Jiri Georg Dokoupil, as well as Andy Warhol—all of whom, in various ways, were challenging art's "old" perceptions. The narrative of "making it" through achieving artistic success (and its oft-associated disenchantment) is inseparable, however, from the city setting. The focus on Basquiat and Warhol in key establishing shots ties their scenes to a particular diegetic location. Central to this is how the city is represented, as it features recurrently in establishing shots and is visible regularly in the background of many scenes. This is as much a film about New York life as it is about the art world, Warhol, and Basquiat.

Art-world acceptance was for Basquiat an uphill battle. Although he was intriguing to many people as a fresh, new artist challenging certain social mores of the time, he was also a black artist in an art world established, managed, and experienced predominantly by white artists, collectors, and audiences. During Basquiat's early years, as depicted in the film, the yet-to-be-discovered artist worked as a laborer in an art gallery. He returns to his workplace one evening and through the letters left clear on the closed frosted glass doors, from Basquiat's point of view, we spy Andy at eye level working the room at Boone Gallery (founded in New York in 1977). But Basquiat is an outsider, which is made plain to the viewer as the low rumble of the chattering crowd and click of camera flashes give way to the nondiegetic sounds of an oboe musically weeping, and the camera frames Basquiat as voyeur onto, not participant in, the event's proceedings.

The film quickly depicts his meteoric rise in the 1980s. It is an ascent tainted by his existence as a pawn in the milieu of the art world's wheeling and dealing, whereby his talent was exploited before his associated and untimely death in 1998 at the age of twenty-seven, from a heroin overdose. While Warhol helped Basquiat and admired his professional determination, he was also critical of his prime motivations and representation of identity markers. From Warhol's own diaries:

24 "David Bowie *Inside Outside,*" YouTube video, 8:32, from a documentary televised on German ZDF TV on September 30, 1995, posted by "izabelabar," August 18, 2008, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-tRdWwMNjYU.

> Monday, October 4, 1982
>
> Down to meet Bruno Bischofberger (cab $7.50). He brought Jean Michel Basquiat with him. He's the kid who used the name "Samo" when he used to sit on the sidewalk in Greenwich Village and paint T-Shirts, and I'd give him $10 here and there and send him up to Serendipity to try to sell the T-Shirts there. He was just one of those kids who drove me crazy. He's black but some people say he's Puerto Rican so I don't know. And then Bruno discovers him and now he's on Easy Street. He's got a great loft on Christie Street. He was a middle-class Brooklyn kid—I mean, he went to college and things—and he was trying to be like that, painting in the Greenwich Village.[25]

Bringing such a moment to life in *Basquiat*, David Bowie is encountered early in the film as Andy Warhol. From a wide shot of a black limousine pulling up in a New York street, Andy emerges with Bruno Bischofberger from the car as the door is held for them by an (uncredited) African American driver. This scene cuts to a medium shot of Basquiat with his friend Benny Dalmau (Benicio del Toro). Basquiat declares, "Warhol," points, and says again, "Warhol," to which Benny states (as a number likely have of Bowie), "He's a fucking homo." But Basquiat is unperturbed and rebuts, "He is the greatest painter in the world."

In a cut to peer over Basquiat's shoulder, we find him thumbing through some palm-sized, hand-painted cards, all different and abstractly decorated. Benny asks him what he is doing, to which he replies: "I am giving him one of these, man; he should have one." Vehemently pushing his finger toward Basquiat's chest, Benny tells him not to: "No, don't *give* him one man; trade! That's what real artists do with each other, besides he'll just use you man, he's famous for it." Basquiat takes his images across the road to follow after Andy/David, entering a small restaurant and watched intensely by the chauffeur. The location of this restaurant is likely Little Italy on Mulberry Street in New York: fluttering Italian flags dangle outside eating places, and this is also the street where Bowie and his wife, Iman, bought an apartment in 1999 and lived until his death in 2016.[26]

As we move to an interior shot of the restaurant, we find Andy and Bruno seated at a linen-covered dining table as Basquiat enters. He walks directly to the two seated men, throws his cards on the table (literally and metaphorically), and sardonically asks, "Do you want to buy some ignorant art, ten bucks a piece?" In close-up we see that Andy has remained silent, deferring to Bruno with a questioning look, to which Bruno responds to Basquiat: "No, I think it's OK." Andy is, however, roused: "Gee, ignorant art, Bruno." Bruno bites and puts his black-rimmed glasses on his nose to peer closely at Basquiat's cards.

25 Pat Hackett, ed., *The Andy Warhol Diaries* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989), 462.

26 David Bowie bought an apartment at 285 Lafayette Street, between Prince and Houston, with Lafayette and Mulberry Streets running parallel to the building. Kate Kelly, "Ziggy in SoHo! David Bowie Buys Two Penthouses for $4 Million," *Observer*, January 18, 1999, http://observer.com/1999/01/ziggy-in-soho-david-bowie-buys-two-penthouses-for-4-million/.

Playing on subversive notions, Basquiat says: "Yeah, you know, like stupid, like ridiculous, crummy art." The viewer is invited to examine up close the "absurd" art over Andy's shoulder as he himself scrutinizes each piece, declaring: "Wow, that *sounds* good, that's new." That Andy pronounces value by the word "sounds" rather than "looks" is suggestive that he is buying into the concept.

The ensuing scene embodies Schnabel's attitudes toward art and commerce; Andy/David is shot in close-up, his face straining and twisting desperately in a noncommittal pose when he declares: "Oh, you didn't work very much on these, I can give you, like, five . . . come on, Bruno, you're rich." To Basquiat he says, "Maybe you should talk to Bruno." In a medium shot, Basquiat is seen shaking his head despairingly: "*You* don't even work on *your* stuff." Bruno counters, however, that "it's not how much you work on something that matters. It's what you can get for them." This is a lesson Basquiat learns as he meets various art dealers and gallery owners in the ensuing years, becoming knowledgeable in business tactics, negotiations, and the "value" of celebrity as he does so.

Andy and Basquiat worked together on a collaborative venture just prior to Andy's death in 1987. This was a contentious pairing, with some accusing Andy of resurrecting his painting by vampirically sucking upon the newfound fame of Basquiat; for others, it was Basquiat leaning on Andy's celebrity status and art-world connections.[27] This part of the story is told via the director's intimate knowledge of both, however, and gently reconstructed. The "artists in collaboration" scene is found toward the end of the film, when Andy/David, in wide shot, is seated on a small chair with a massive completed canvas behind him in his studio. His legs are comfortably crossed; paint-soaked roller in hand, he is watching Basquiat paint. He whines, "Well, gee, Jean, that was my favorite part." For the viewer, the scene cuts to a medium shot of Basquiat painting a bold white stripe across the middle of a screen-printed galloping, winged black horse, then cuts back to Andy/David, painting a bold white stripe across the middle of a screen-printed galloping, winged black horse. By way of allegory regarding *his* experience in the art world, touched with irony, Basquiat backs up to stand by Andy/David, points, and declares authoritatively that the black image "needs more white"; the sardonic social comment is implicit.

Performing softly his melodramatic "moment," Andy/David saunters with roller in hand and drawls, "You make me feel so worthless; you're so famous now," and strolls on to take his turn at the giant canvas, applying red and then blue paint to a screen-print image of the Amoco (gas company) logo that the black horse is leaping over.[28] The profound emotion conveyed through his melodramatic acting demands a level of intensity and expressivity together, and both are present in this scene in *Basquiat*. Aside from the skillful physical bodywork one expects from Bowie, which derives from his early training in mime—the shuffling, depressed, slouched physicality, the arched bobbling head and bobbling lower jaw—he pays close attention to conveying Warhol's

27 Vivien Raynor, "Art: Basquiat, Warhol," *New York Times*, September 20, 1985, http://www.nytimes.com/1985/09/20/arts/art-basquiat-warhol.html.

28 Stephen Lacey, "Just Plain Odd: Some Thoughts on Performance Styles in *Twin Peaks*," *Cinema Journal* 55, no. 3 (2016): 126–131.

shyness and vulnerability: the outraged darting eyes, the solicitude, and the quiet vocal work with its constantly unconfident rising inflections. With the lip-biting, the hesitations and delays in responding, there is a constant sense of inner reflection in the way Bowie plays Warhol. One finds in the performance beats of self-doubt, anxiety, and uncertainty that express a rich inner life. This allows for an increasing sense of intimacy in the jump cuts in his relationship with Basquiat over the course of years, a friendship that unfolds in only three scenes in the film.

That David Bowie also paints confuses the viewer into exactly the dilemma Schnabel intended, raising the question of whether one is seeing Andy painting or David painting. Hedging the narrative, the two artists are discussing fame, and asynchronously, "Fame" is a song written in 1975 by Bowie in his own collaboration with fellow musicians John Lennon and Carlos Alomar (*Young Americans*, 1975). As the two give thoughtful consideration to the topic's nuances, the camera cuts back to Basquiat, seated and tipping red paint out for Andy/David. He says with some derision: "Famous! I don't even have any friends now 'cept from you . . . everyone says 'Warhol,' death-warmed-over person on drugs. He's just using you." The pair are seen in shot-reverse-shot working in companionable silence. A subsequent wide shot allows David /Andy to walk back and join Basquiat. Seated then in close-up, Andy/David says poignantly: "Maybe you just shouldn't take things so seriously . . . people are saying that you are burning your candle at both ends. Well, I think it is awful that people are talking like that. I think you should like, you know, stick around, prove them wrong."

In a film made by a painter, featuring an artist played by a musician, the perimeters between art forms, typical of the convergence occurring in Europe but to a lesser degree in the United States at the time of the film's making, collapse. The film is not, despite what it seems, a wholly cynical appraisal of the art world or a lacquering of Basquiat's fame and talent. The art seen hanging on walls is proof that "true" beauty, enlightenment, and catharsis are possible even if experienced only momentarily. This is a counterpoint to the interpretation that art dealers welding economic power simply peddle financially driven scams to the detriment of vulnerable artists. With contemporary music's pop icon David Bowie playing the art world's revolutionary pop icon, the result is that both star images of "David Bowie" and "Andy Warhol" are ultimately mirrored in the filmic representation of Andy Warhol by David Bowie. Thus, Bowie's portrayal of Warhol in seemingly effortless ways is potent and becomes a genuine, and personal, homage. ✻

~~New Killer Star~~

by Jacqueline Furby

Images of violence and death are commonly found in David Bowie's music and film art. This can be violence felt by him, violence he directs against himself, violence that he offers to others, and the violence of others directed toward him. This essay considers how violence and death play out in two of Bowie's on-screen appearances from the beginning of the 1980s—the BBC teleplay *Baal* (Alan Clarke, 1982) and the film *The Hunger* (Tony Scott, 1983)—in terms of the shadowy, incorporeal space itself around death. This liminal space is clearly suggestive of death's status as the threshold between life and what comes after, but it also contains other noteworthy implications. For example, the space is an arena where potential events, states, and meanings are held in suspension, such as life and death, presence/absence, and us/them. This is a phenomenon that is represented here by the crossed-out title ~~New Killer Star~~, the name of a Bowie song that means one thing when written and another when spoken (it sounds like "nuclear star"), thus rendering it ambiguously both there and not there. As such, the idea of the liminal speaks to Bowie's continued use of ambiguity, conflict, and paradox in his art. This essay is therefore primarily interested in what these performances contribute to an understanding of Bowie and his art rather than other social and cultural readings that might, with equal validity, be applied to them.[1]

A number of writers have noted how Bowie "creates and exists in certain types of spaces"; for example, Toija Cinque, Christopher Moore, and Sean Redmond cite Bowie's "urban, alien, tourist and inter-galactic" spaces.[2] Tanya Stark has discussed Bowie's consistent engagement with death and the "symbolic centrality of death that permeates" his career and links this to his "fascination with liminal spaces."[3] Although she doesn't explicitly refer to the metaphysical

1 For example, *The Hunger* has been read as an extended AIDS allegory, although, as Nixon argues, the date of the film's release arguably makes this argument problematic. See Nicola Nixon "When Hollywood Sucks, or, Hungry Girls, Lost Boys, and Vampirism in the Age of Reagan," in *Blood Read: The Vampire as Metaphor in Contemporary Culture*, ed. Joan Gordon and Veronica Hollinger (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 115–128. The film has also been discussed in terms of its (negative) representation of homosexuality, for instance, in the depiction of Miriam as a predatory, disease-carrying killer. See Harry M. Benshoff, *Monsters in the Closet* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1997).

2 Toija Cinque, Christopher Moore, and Sean Redmond, eds., *Enchanting David Bowie: Space/Time/Body/Memory* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), loc. 2.

3 Tanya Stark, "Confronting Bowie's Mysterious Corpses," in *Enchanting David Bowie: Space/Time/Body/Memory*, ed. Toija Cinque, Christopher Moore, and Sean Redmond (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 62.

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place between life and death, I take up this reading of "liminal" in connection with these two texts because it is in this marginal land where the dual drives of Eros and Thanatos compete for screen time that the action of *Baal* and *The Hunger* take place.

Alan Clarke's *Baal* is an adaptation of German playwright Bertolt Brecht's first play (1918). Brecht's *Baal* has little relationship to the "epic theater" he later pioneered that sought to force the audience into being active by employing his *Verfremdungseffekt* (alienation effect), where they were encouraged to remain aware that they were watching a fictional performance in order to promote a social-critical response in them. When Clarke directed the play for the BBC in 1982, he introduced some elements, such as the split screen, the tableau, and the character of Baal singing and speaking directly to camera, to gesture toward Brecht's later style and deny the audience the passive voyeuristic spectator position. Baal is, as Paul Morley explains in *The Age of Bowie*, a "lone, angry, messianic, adolescent and heavy-drinking poet idolized by his peers," and he can be compared to Arthur Rimbaud, the influential nineteenth-century "savage symbolist" poet.[4] Morley says that Rimbaud is a model of the "post-adolescent insecurity tipping into fury and rage that's at the heart of the clichéd bad boy rock star."[5] Baal is an "amoral, anarchistic, anti-authoritarian, anti-social, snarling hater of women but inexplicably attractive to them"; he "spurns and alienates everyone he comes in contact with, leaving destruction in his wake."[6] Rather than lingering on the ruin of other characters, though, the narrative focuses on Baal's flight toward death. After murdering at least one person (off-screen) and abandoning the mother of his unborn child, we see Baal dying alone and abject in a woodcutter's cottage.

The Hunger also focuses on the prolonged journey toward the annihilation of Bowie's character. He plays the beautiful undead vampire John Blaylock, who lives with his exquisite six-thousand-year-old wife, Miriam (Catherine Deneuve), and together they prey on and then drain the blood of willing New Yorkers before disposing of their remains in the basement furnace of their elegant home. A central theme of the film is mortality, immortality, and accelerated aging. Miriam is an immortal, and we quickly learn that John cannot claim that status. At the film's start he seems to have almost reached the end of his three-hundred-year span of youth, and within a few moments of our first sight of him, he starts to age rapidly. In fewer than twenty-five minutes he is unrecognizable as Bowie, having been turned into a living corpse. Within another ten minutes John remains fully sentient but relegated to a coffin in the attic, and Miriam's plan is under way to replace him with gerontologist Sarah Roberts (Susan Sarandon), who studies diseases in humans that cause premature aging. But things don't quite go as Miriam hopes. Sarah replaces Miriam as the immortal, and Miriam finds herself discarded and entombed as well.

Bowie's character John is a liminal being, not fully vampire, as his immortal status is conditional, no longer human, not alive and not dead. At the film's start he is seemingly undead, but then the true burden of the term becomes apparent as he starts to rapidly

4 Paul Morley, *The Age of Bowie: How David Bowie Made a World of Difference* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2016), loc. 5904.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

age and decay. In *Powers of Horror* Julia Kristeva tells us that the corpse is the "utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life," but it seems to the spectator that the crumbling husk of Bowie's once graceful and desirable form, now perpetually just before death, is more abject than it ever would be after it.[7]

It is well documented that Bowie created and killed off a number of aspects of his self—personas and archetypes—in the service of his art.[8] Part of his art has also been the creation and perpetuation of his rock-god identity, and so he is also known for being a charismatic star with a celebrated body connected to a number of sexual and gender identities—promiscuous, gay, bisexual, straight, pansexual, masculine, feminine, androgynous. This kind of identity formation and transformation (cycling through his various personas and gender and sexual identities) is linked to his aura of mutability and difference, which is also signaled by means of his celebrity body—his eyes, his physical grace, and his thinness, all of which have also been exploited as signifying his alien otherness. All of this heightens his status as object of the gaze and also the potentially problematic phenomenon of the male body as object of the eroticized gaze. This is a phenomenon often dealt with by violence in film. *Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence* (Nagisa Oshima, 1983) is a good example that Rosalind Galt explores in her essay "David Bowie's Perverse Cinematic Body," and that Redmond also explores elsewhere.[9] Bowie's character, Major Jack Celliers, whose appearance is styled as a beautiful Hollywood movie star, becomes the central spectacle of the Japanese prisoner-of-war camp and attracts the troubled, homoerotic gaze of the camp's Captain Yonoi (Ryuichi Sakamoto). As a result Celliers is killed slowly and publicly (he is buried in sand up to his neck and left to die of exposure and dehydration under the hot sun), and his death can be read as punishment either for the sexual transgression he represents or because he is the male object of the gaze, which amounts to the same thing.

Baal and *The Hunger* can be seen as also meting out this sadistic punishment, because the characters played by Bowie similarly die as a result of their transgressive status and are victimized as outsiders by the narrative. Alternatively, at the same time these performances can be seen as another example of Bowie willingly killing off aspects of his own self and are further evidence of his artistic, creative concern with death, and of turning death into art. Rather than being the passive victim of violence in *Baal* and *The Hunger*, he can be read as the active instigator in attracting sadistic violence toward himself, or at least toward aspects of his persona, and positioning himself in a liminal, marginal space between life and death: a space that should be familiar to fans of his music. A well-known example is the astronaut Major Tom, who features in Bowie's 1969 single "Space Oddity." By the end of the song Major Tom is left floating in space in an ambiguous state, with seemingly no way to return to Earth. The character is revisited in the 1980 single "Ashes to Ashes," where he is still neither alive nor dead,

7 Julia Kristeva, "Approaching Abjection," in *Powers of Horror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 3.

8 See Tanya Stark, "Crashing Out with Sylvian: David Bowie, Carl Jung and the Unconscious," in *David Bowie: Critical Perspectives*, ed. Eoin Devereux, Aileen Dillane, and Martin J. Power (New York: Routledge, 2015), 82–110.

9 See Rosalind Galt's essay "David Bowie's Perverse Cinematic Body" in this In Focus, and also Sean Redmond, "The Whiteness of David Bowie," in *Enchanting David Bowie: Space/Time/Body/Memory*, ed. Toija Cinque, Christopher Moore, and Sean Redmond (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 215–230.

and he makes a final appearance in 2016's "Blackstar," where in the music video his bejeweled skull is given a continued existence as a religious relic. Like Major Tom, Bowie's personas, adopted as part of the spectacle of his music and performance, generally embody and explore liminality, being outsiders, aliens, exotic others, or figures of transgression and deviance.

The threshold space between one world and another is where the boundary between the two places is often porous and unclear. I have written elsewhere about the paraxial realm between real and fantasy spaces and how the two worlds might meet and mingle in the paraxial, creating meaning not otherwise achieved in the two realms alone.[10] When narrative is changed in this way, the effect is to make the familiar strange, to destabilize meaning and foreground the act of artistic creation while forcing the audience to acknowledge the will of the artist, yet at the same time inviting fresh interpretations not necessarily intended by the author of the original work. Baal's story is made strange by Clarke's interpretation of Brecht's ideas about the alienation effect mentioned earlier. Clarke's Baal looks to camera and the spectator. The screen is split. The audience is aware that they are watching a mediated form, and viewers are given the chance to question what they see and to create something themselves. Speaking years later about audience interpretations of an artwork in the context of the impact of the Internet, Bowie said that "a piece of work is not finished until the audience come to it and adds their own interpretation," and "what the piece of art is about is the grey space in the middle" between the artist and the audience.[11]

In *Baal*, *The Hunger*, and *Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence*, the fate of Bowie's characters who suffer and die can be read symbolically as society's "punishment" for his long-held status as a marginal other, a figure of transgressive pansexuality and androgynous gender performance.[12] However, Bowie's roles in this teleplay and these films, considered alongside his career as songwriter, musician, and singer, suggest that something else was happening that is equally compelling. Any Bowie fan might justifiably feel frustrated by the way that these texts were not offering the Bowie experience they might have hoped for. Bowie was being promised and then withheld. This pattern of presence and absence, or mediated presence, was, however, a common one throughout Bowie's career, as he apparently conducted his public life to leave his audiences wanting more.

An example of this mediated presence is our first sight of Bowie as poet and musician Baal, in the pretitle sequence, an atypical sight for fans familiar with his normally high standard of personal presentation. Baal, who appears in a medium

10 Jacqueline Furby and Claire Hines, *Fantasy* (London: Routledge, 2012), 48–50.

11 "David Bowie Speaks to Jeremy Paxman on BBC *Newsnight* (1999)," YouTube video, 16:06, from a program televised in 1999, posted by BBC *Newsnight*, January 11, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FiK7s_0tGsg.

12 This reading can be supported by borrowing and redeploying critical arguments by Laura Mulvey and by Steve Neal and Gaylyn Studlar made in response to other contexts. The thrust is that Bowie's characters are sadistically tortured and killed within and by the narrative partly because he represented sexual and gender transgression, but also because he was the uncomfortable and untenable figure of the male embodiment of "to-be-looked-at-ness" and object of the eroticized gaze. See Steve Neale, "Masculinity as Spectacle: Reflections on Men and Mainstream Cinema," in *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in the Hollywood Cinema*, ed. Steve Cohan and Ina Rae Hark (London: Routledge, 1993); Gaylyn Studlar, "Masochism and the Perverse Pleasures of the Cinema," in *Movies and Methods*, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 2:602–624.

shot, is unkempt and dirty. He looks tired; the color seems to have been washed with a dull sepia tone, and Bowie's famous blue eyes with mismatched pupils appear gray and cold. The plain brown backdrop echoes the brown of Baal's hair and beard and grimy clothing. The pre-1990s dental-veneer snaggleteeth are, as one of his poems points out, "foul with nicotine stains," and we learn as Baal's story develops that his character is as ugly as his exterior. Despite being hailed within the diegesis as charismatically attractive to both men and women, he is repellently misogynist and a sexual predator who sadistically torments the women in his life.

Nicolas Pegg describes Baal as a "monster of sensuality and self-gratification" who is "named after a bestial pagan deity" and who rejects bourgeois society's moral codes as he degenerates into violence, murder, and death.[13] This is an interesting role for Bowie. His creative work historically involved charismatic and doomed messianic characters, and he clearly understood how to manipulate an audience; his casting and performance lend credence to Baal's hold over a private salon or public house. *Baal*'s producer Louis Marks commented that he saw Baal as a modern-day rock star and that the part called for "someone who was a star in his own right, someone to mirror the person himself" and that "Bowie was ideal."[14]

In addition to other alienation techniques mentioned earlier, Baal delivers his lines in a mannered way and narrates events that draw attention to the artifice of his performance. For example, in an early scene he says to no one in particular, "In the year 1904 Joseph Mech offers Baal a light for his cigar." These practices prevent the audience from achieving the comfortable contract of the "suspension of disbelief" required from most mainstream fictional narratives and are designed to encourage the audience to question and challenge what they see and what it means for their own lives.[15] Other "alienation effect" elements, added to those drawn from the visual conventions of the theater, reinforce Bowie's presence in absence through figure positions, blocking, and the use of long shots, which ensure that we are kept at a distance from the characters. For example, Baal often faces away from the camera, denying us the full and close-up view of a character's face that we are used to in narrative cinema and from which we have been trained to understand a character's emotions and intentions. While the physical space of *Baal* is organized around Bowie, and while he plays the titular character and is the central point of each scene—and the chief focus of the other characters' attentions—he is not the charismatic star body here. As the film charts Baal's descent, we witness his physical decline. Any expectations of Bowie satisfying us in terms of upholding his power as the carrier of charisma and the embodiment of the celebrity body are continually disappointed and denied in this production.

This denial of any opportunity to desire the star body is also true of *The Hunger*, and while Bowie is present on-screen he is also absent. We see a great deal more of Deneuve's character Miriam, and Sarandon's character Sarah, than we do of Bowie's.

13 Nicholas Pegg, *The Complete David Bowie*, 6th ed. (London: Titan Books, 2011), loc. 617.

14 Ibid., 618.

15 It must be acknowledged that *Baal* is an adaptation of a theatrical play and retains some of the conventions of theatrical productions, which naturally insert distance between the audience and onstage events that denies the possibility of the contract of the suspension of disbelief.

Before he starts to age, the camera's view of his face is generally obscured: by fast cutting, by voile curtains (of which there are a great many in their home), by raindrops on a window, by the expressionistic shadows, by the chiaroscuro mist of remembrance, by the dim light of a nightclub, and by dark glasses. Once he begins to age we are granted a better view, but by this time his features are hidden under the layers of prosthetic makeup. Among other things, the title of the film refers to the terrible addiction that possesses John as he accelerates toward the final stage of his undead state. This hunger is manifested in the longing that is the subject of the early scenes: his longing for the fast-disappearing "forever and ever," mobilized by his awareness that his time is limited. However, it is the lesbian romance between Miriam and Sarah that is the spectacular focus of the majority of the film and what holds the spectator's attention rather than the rotting flesh of John's vampire body. The novel, written by Whitley Strieber in 1981, spends less time on John's decline and more time instead on how the medical and scientific community behave toward Miriam as an alien being, interrogating that status sadistically with science.[16]

Bowie's work has often been concerned with challenging easy binaries and playing with ambiguities of image and language. This can be seen in his musical career, where he would act out a number of character roles in the lyrics of a song, such as "Blackstar," for example, where he sings the parts of the angel of death, the dying man, a prophet, an onlooker, and (possibly) the disease itself. For the 1995 album *1. Outside*, he voiced the characters of Ramona A. Stone, perpetrator of the "art-ritual murder" of fourteen-year-old victim Baby Grace, whom he also voiced, along with the witness to the "art crime," Algeria Touchschriek, and the crime's investigator, Nathan Adler.[17] In both *Baal* and *The Hunger* his roles similarly switch between aggressor and victim, and both productions play with the fan audience's desire to gaze at Bowie by largely denying them that particular pleasure.

These liminal spaces, and those found in his music, aren't necessarily just a place of death; they can be thought of as caught *between* life and death. Will Brooker argues convincingly that alongside the "undeniable theme of death" in Bowie's work sits the "idea of coming back to life, of regeneration."[18] Where this leaves us is in a place of contradictions, characterized by potential conflict, coexistent realities, explanations, and a feedback loop of meaning and interpretation: continuance. Bowie's interest in Tibetan Buddhism is relevant here, in particular his beliefs about *bardo*, a variety of intermediate states, and the possibility of enlightenment achieved in the transitional state of being in between two lives: "Knowledge comes with death's release," and "You can tell me all about it on the next Bardo."[19] Brooker uses deconstruction, Jacques Derrida's approach to the creation of meaning, with its concept that when a binary opposition operates (life-death), it is not so much an either-or choice but an equal

16 Whitley Strieber, *The Hunger* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981).

17 See Nicolaas P. Greco, *David Bowie in Darkness: A Study of "1. Outside" and the Late Career* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2015).

18 Will Brooker, *Forever Stardust: David Bowie across the Universe* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2017), 166.

19 See John Baldock, ed., *The Tibetan Book of the Dead: The Manuscript of the Bardo Thödol*, translated by Lāma Kazi Dawa-Samdup (London: Arcturus, 2013). Lyrics from the single "Quicksand," *Hunky Dory* (David Bowie, 1971).

balance between the two, and-and.[20] So the life-death binary exists, but both terms are equally present and valid. Brooker goes on to discuss Derrida's use of the term *sous rature* ("under erasure"), derived from Martin Heidegger, which can be used to suggest the coexistence of two states or an in-between state.[21] Brooker says that the "concept of 'sous rature' . . . captures the fluid dynamic between presence and absence, life and death, no and yes, being and nothingness, and other terms, usually supposed to be binary opposites, throughout Bowie's work."[22] The idea that something may be both present and absent can be represented (following Heidegger, Derrida, and Brooker) as a word crossed out: ~~Bowie / New Killer Star~~.[23] So, this concern with life, death, and killing is not new for Bowie, but it is new for the fans since Bowie's death on January 10, 2016, when every reference takes on fresh meaning. And it is arguable that this marginal landscape, the metaphysical space between alive and dead, the *bardo*, provided the setting for his final artworks.

Stark, Brooker, and others discuss the death spaces of 2013's *The Next Day*, which Stark calls "art on suicide watch," but an even more acute death obsession can be found in his final act, the play *Lazarus*.[24] A possible reading of *Lazarus* is that the play's action takes place in the mind of Thomas Jerome Newton. The stage and mise-en-scène are brain-matter beige. There are two windows in the back wall that equate to eyes opening onto the external world. This places the audience with the players in Newton's head. The play opens with Newton laying prone on the stage, suggesting that he is either already dead or in that liminal space between life and death (both alive and dead) that this essay has argued provides the setting for much of Bowie's work, but certainly for *Baal* and *The Hunger*. If indeed Newton is dead, or on the threshold of death, at the start of the play, he briefly "rises" from the dead, becomes undead, to process and understand that he is dead, and to find rest, which is what we witness happening. The play's other characters—Michael, Elly, Zach, Japanese Woman / Maemi, three unnamed teenage girls, Girl (Marley), Valentine, and Ben—are the various parts of his persona (selves and shadow selves) that get to work through their dramas as his mind cycles through his shutdown routine until he is able to be set free, to move on.

The artwork that is Bowie, which was created by David Jones the artist, came to popularly signify change, mutability, transgression, and difference. Difference is clearly valuable to celebrities and stars because, as Nick Stevenson says, why would the public spend their "hard-earned money on someone who is merely talented"? Also, "stars are literally people to look up to. . . . There is no one quite like them."[25] When Jones/Bowie killed off Ziggy Stardust on stage on July 3, 1973 (according to the album, he was torn apart), the fans were inconsolable and feared that Bowie would not perform again. If he hadn't realized before this, it then was apparent to Bowie

20 Brooker, *Forever Stardust*, 47.

21 Ibid, 185.

22 Ibid, 187.

23 Ibid.

24 Stark, "Confronting Bowie's Mysterious Corpses," 61.

25 Nick Stevenson, *David Bowie: Fame, Sound and Vision* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2006), 2.

that fan interest is intensified if the star withholds and is elusive rather than available. It is arguable that Bowie withdrew to a place where he could be both present and absent. This in-between space is ideal for someone who positions himself in the transitional margins—between male and female, masculine and feminine, gay and straight, alive and dead. The idea of marginality and absence in presence is part of Bowie's mythology as a shaman who travels between this world and the spirit world: an alien, a spaceman, where the theme of outer space is used as a metaphor for inner space but with a sense of strangeness and distance. Bowie certainly understood early in his career how to enrapture his fans through his music but also through his image, which wove further fantasy and mystique around his various personas and his musical art. He created art of his being in the world, which culminated in the way he approached his life and his death.

The violence is not just in the narratives, then; it's Bowie's violence. He killed his personas to entertain himself, to further his art (death as art and murder as art), to play with ideas around his celebrity body, and paradoxically to embody presence in absence. He clearly tells us this in one of his last songs, "No Plan," which featured in the play *Lazarus* (also from the 2017 EP *No Plan*) and is a heartrendingly poignant instance of his occupation of the marginal space between life and death, while turning death into art: "This is no place, but here I am." ✻

Contributors

Toija Cinque's main research interest lies in exploring the intersections between stardom and celebrity, digital ethnography, audience, and reception studies with other studies in social and screen media and communications. Her works include *Changing Media Landscapes: Visual Networking* (Oxford University Press, 2015), the cowritten *Communication, Digital Media and Everyday Life*, 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press, 2015), and *Enchanting David Bowie: Space/Time/Body/Memory* (coedited, Bloomsbury, 2015). Cinque co-convenes the Persona, Celebrity, Publics research group at Deakin University. Her forthcoming work is *Everyone Says "Hi": The Fandom of David Bowie* (Palgrave) with Sean Redmond.

Jacqueline Furby is senior lecturer in film at Southampton Solent University. Her publications include *Fantasy* (Routledge, 2012), *The Cinema of Christopher Nolan*: *Imagining the Impossible* (Columbia University Press / Wallflower 2015), and *The Shape of Film Time* (forthcoming).

Rosalind Galt is professor of film studies at King's College London. Her research addresses transnational cinemas, aesthetics, politics, and queer and feminist theories. Her publications include *Queer Cinema in the World* (coauthored with Karl Schoonover; Duke University Press, 2016), *Pretty: Film and the Decorative Image* (Columbia University Press, 2011), and *The New European Cinema: Redrawing the Map* (Columbia University Press, 2006).

Angela Ndalianis is professor in media and entertainment in the Department of Media and Communication, Swinburne University of Technology. Her research focuses on entertainment media and media histories, genre studies, and visual effects. Her publications include *Neo-Baroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment* (MIT Press, 2004), *Science Fiction Experiences* (New Academia, 2010), *The Horror Sensorium: Media and the Senses* (McFarland, 2012), *The Contemporary Comic Book Superhero* (editor, Routledge, 2009), *Neo-Baroques: From Latin America to the Hollywood Blockbuster* (coeditor, Brill, 2016), and *Fans and Videogames: History, Fandom, Archives* (coeditor, Routledge, 2017).

Sean Redmond is professor in screen and design at Deakin University, Australia. His research interests are in film and television aesthetics, film and television genre, film authorship, film sound, and stardom and celebrity. He convenes the Melbourne-based Eye Tracking and the Moving Image Research Group, and the Science Fiction Research Group at Deakin University. His published works include A *Companion to Celebrity* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), *Enchanting David Bowie: Space/Time/Body/Memory* (Bloomsbury, 2015), coedited with Toija Cinque and Christopher Moore, *The AFI Film Reader: Endangering Science Fiction Film* (AFI, 2015), *Celebrity and the Media* (Palgrave, 2014), and *The Cinema of Takeshi Kitano: Flowering Blood* (Wallflower, 2013). With Su Holmes, he edits the journal *Celebrity Studies*, short-listed by the Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers in 2011 for best new academic journal.