



**David Bowie: A Case Study of Authenticity in the
Multifaceted Artist**

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Abstract

This dissertation draws attention to a central issue: There are limits in the applicability of “traditional” definitions of authenticity from popular music discourse. In defining authentic artists as those displaying a true sense of themselves, others and their culture, multifaceted artists, who rarely boast these qualities, are at once dismissed. Yet to one’s mind, these sorts of artists are authentic and these definitions fail to do them justice.

To tackle this issue, using David Bowie, a widely acclaimed multifaceted artist, as its case study, first the “traditional” definitions are introduced and applied. Through this it is concluded that they are applicable only in part, and so not applicable consistently enough to be deemed good definitions for multifaceted artists.

Following this, the characteristics of the multifaceted artist that make it difficult to apply “traditional” definitions are identified, and alternative definitions of authenticity that complement these characteristics are brought in and applied.

These approaches beg the question that perhaps the issue lies not in the multifaceted nature of some artists, but with authenticity itself. Subsequently, it is submitted that authenticity itself is a limiting concept, because of its polysemous nature, and that the definitions are problematic and subjective, because they are based on the self (including the other) and culture, both subjective concepts. Furthermore, it is suggested that Bowie is proof of this. On the other hand, inauthenticity is found to be the true mark of authenticity, in setting up and confirming authenticity’s flawed nature, and in promoting reinvention and artistic versatility as authentic.

In short, multifaceted artists are perhaps not authentic, but “inauthentically authentic,” thanks to their versatile, unfixed natures.

Contents

Acknowledgements	4
Illustrations	5
Introduction	
The problem of authenticity	6
Chapter One: The authenticity examination	
What is authenticity?	8
Chapter Two: David Bowie and the problem of authenticity	12
David Bowie and first person authenticity	13
David Bowie and second person authenticity	14
David Bowie and third person authenticity	18
David Bowie, authenticity and the outsider	18
The polysemous work of art	20
The amalgam	21
The co-opted artist	24
Chapter Three: David Bowie's Authenticity	
The rise and fall of David Bowie and his authenticity	26
Bowie and his collaborators: a collective authenticity	27
David Bowie and form	30
The myth of David Bowie	34
Dissolution of the self, culture and authenticity: The logic of authentic inauthenticity	37
Conclusion	41
Links	43
Bibliography	47
Discography	51
Filmography	53

Acknowledgements

To the master (1947-2016)

“I watch the ripples change their size, but never leave the stream of warm impermanence.” (*Changes, Hunky Dory*).

Mariana has many people to thank for her progress on this dissertation: Firstly, her supervisor Dr. Geoff Baker for patiently dealing with all her wild ideas and steering her in the right direction, Dr. Carlo Cenciarelli, for showing her *Critical perspectives* and Dr. Tregear for *The Authenticity Hoax*, both of which in turn greatly helped formulate the basis for this dissertation. Besides these she also has Dr. Kardos, Dr. Bradley, Dr. Page, Dr. Benn, Ms Cumming, Dr. Perrott, Dr. Goodwin and many others besides who went above and beyond and shared their cutting edge research that proved invaluable to her.

She would also like to thank her friends, some of whom were a great support and inspiration for the task and, her family, without whom, she would never have been introduced to the television show, *Life on Mars* and become fascinated with Bowie’s music, or made that trip to Berlin and come across Ruther’s intriguing story about the man who never had a single face.

Lastly, she thanks with all her heart, the man himself: David Bowie, to whom she dedicates this dissertation, for the incredible artistic legacy he created, without which, it would not exist.

The first draft of this paper was completed, by coincidence, on the eve of his passing. It is indisputable that his passing shed new light on the project, and brought it a new level of significance and poignancy.

It is hoped that the paper is testament to one thing in particular: David Jones is dead, but David Bowie Is forever.

Illustrations

Figures

Figure 1: *It's No Game*, Bowiesongs, 17. Accessed April 8, 2016.

<http://bowiesongs.tumblr.com/post/8643857806/its-no-game>.

Figure 2: Nigel French, “Bowie Map,” nigelfrench, 21. Accessed December 31, 2015.

<http://nigelfrench.bigcartel.com/product/bowie-map>.

Figure 3.1: *Where Are We Now*, Hooktheory, 31. Accessed December 31, 2015.

<http://www.hooktheory.com/theorytab/view/david-bowie/where-are-we-now>.

Figure 3.2: Leah Kardos. *Vocal Styles Across Catalogue (sic.)*, Leah Kardos, 32. Accessed December 31, 2015.

Introduction

The problem of authenticity

Bowie: “All through my youth, I would use bravado and device - costume and flamboyant behaviour - in a desperate attempt to not be iced out of everything.”

Brown: “In other words, so you didn’t have to be you?”

Bowie: “Exactly...It’s interesting how you can do this at parties. In a simple family game such as charades you see these incredible manifestations of personality come out of Uncle Bill...That device allows you in an exaggerated form to display who you are. And I used a lot of those things.”¹

In this interview with Mick Brown, Bowie openly admits to taking on personalities in order to avoid displaying his true identity. He then claims to be displaying an “exaggerated form” of himself in the process. But is this not a contradiction? Is Bowie truly revealing himself in these guises, albeit in exaggerated form, or not? Could we ever be in a position to label David Bowie (the artist) as “authentic?” This exposes a problem we face when defining and identifying authenticity: is there a single way we can define it?

As Frith puts it: “The most misleading term in cultural theory is...“authenticity.” What we should be examining is not how true a piece of music is to something else, but how it sets up the idea of “truth” in the first place.”²

¹ Mike Brown, “David Bowie interview in 1996: I have done just about everything that it’s possible to do.” *The Telegraph*, January 11, 2016, accessed February 27, 2016,

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/music/artists/david-bowie-interview-from-1996-i-have-done-just-about-everythin/#>.

² Simon Frith, Allan Moore “U2 and the Myth of Authenticity in Rock,” 5, accessed April 8, 2016, <http://allanfmoore.org.uk/U2myth.pdf>.

This dissertation examines definitions of authenticity and their limitations, exploring the extent to which it is possible to call an artist authentic when that artist cannot be singularly defined. It will attempt to make a contribution to the academic field of research in popular music and authenticity, related to artists who are attributable to no single musical genre/style/voice for reasons of all-round versatility, or transformations throughout their career, and ask whether such artists can still be considered “authentic” in any way. David Bowie, though only one example, is the perfect case study for such an exploration.

Chapter one: The authenticity examination

The extensive literature on authenticity is evidence that no single definition exists. This chapter will first examine all definitions of authenticity relevant to this dissertation, aiming discover whether David Bowie can be considered authentic under “conventional” terms of authenticity. It will study Bowie under what Allan Moore³ has termed first, third and second person authenticities and how they can be applied to argue that Bowie is an authentic artist according to those theories.

What is authenticity?

The rise of rock provoked discourse relating to authenticity. The genre became a hallmark for authenticity, contrasted with popular music, seen as “commercially driven.” Yet, the breadth of literature on authenticity makes it difficult to define. One can draw out three principal approaches, articulated in different ways by different authors:⁴

Some scholars are in agreement that an authentic artist offers performances with a genuine total sense of their situation, character or creativity. Moore⁵ believes that “first person authenticity” is present in an artist when they present a performance that displays their life situation and their feelings about it. Similarly, Barker and Taylor⁶ feel that a “personally” authentic artist expresses and reveals something about themselves with sincere and serious intention. For Kivy,⁷ the artist presents something “self-originated,” and therefore, not only their personal character and situation, but also their creativity, through being authors of music they perform.

A second approach is that an authentic artist effectively represents feelings or experiences for many people to relate to, even if they are not their own. Therefore,

³ Allan Moore, “Authenticity as Authentication,” *Popular Music* 21 (2): Cambridge University Press (2002): 209-23, accessed November 21, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/853683>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., 209.

⁶ Hugh Barker and Yuval Taylor, *Faking it: The Quest for Authenticity in Popular Music*. (New York/London: W.W. Norton & Company Ltd, 2007), x, 210.

⁷ Kivy, Peter, *Authenticities: Philosophical Reflections on Musical Performance* (Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press 1995), 3.

“representational” authenticity may be an appropriate term. For Moore⁸, an artist boasting “second person authenticity” offers performances displaying what is truly occurring in the lives of others, and how they feel about it. In similar words, Grossberg⁹ feels this artist provides the audience with a sense of “belonging.” Their music may tackle political or other relatable issues.

There is widespread agreement that an authentic artist offers performances reflecting a genuine sense of their own culture. Barker and Taylor¹⁰ name this kind of authenticity “cultural authenticity.” For them, possibly, the artist offers a sense of “cultural integrity”, making frequent reference to their own culture. Bohlman¹¹ seems to agree, arguing that the artist will consistently represent the origins of a style, in this case through a culturally rooted performance. Similarly, Moore¹² believes the artist displaying “third person authenticity” presents performances showing what it is truly like to be of their culture, and what it is about.

Behr¹³ takes Moore’s definitions to a plural level, considering the idea of “collective authentication,” where in a band, artists create a collective image that they project with their own musical expressions and embed them in musical culture, achieving recognition in the process.

Some writers have noted the challenge of defining authenticity, using its characteristics as definitions. Marshall and Dyer¹⁴ state that authenticity is not fixed in its meaning, while, not dissimilarly, Frith¹⁵ names authentic sounds as a “system of

⁸ Moore, “Authenticity as Authentication,” 209.

⁹ Lawrence Grossberg, So-Rim Lee, “Philip Auslander, David Bowie’s Authentic Inauthenticity.” *So-Rim Lee*, September 8, 2010, accessed April 8, 2015, <http://www.so-rimlee.com/literature-supernova/2010/9/9/philip-auslander-david-bowies-authentic-inauthenticity.html>

¹⁰ Barker and Taylor, *Faking it*, x.

¹¹ Philip Bohlman, Moore, “Authenticity as Authentication,” 213.

¹² *Ibid.*, 209.

¹³ Behr, “Join Together with the Band”: Authenticating Collective

Creativity in Bands and the Myth of Rock Authenticity Reappraised,” *Rock Music Studies*, 2 (1): (2000): 1-21, 14-16, accessed December 31, 2015, doi: 10.1080/19401159.2014.969976.

¹⁴ Marshall and Dyer, Eoin Devereux, Aileen Dillane and Martin J. Power eds., *David Bowie: Critical Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 57.

¹⁵ Simon Frith, So-Rim Lee, “Bowie’s Authentic Inauthenticity.”

signs” without a source from which their meanings derive. Supporting these claims, Rubidge¹⁶ believes that authenticity is ascribed externally rather than being inherent. On the other hand, rock discourse argues that meaning can be derived from an authentic performance offering “unmediated expression,” even if a listener cannot understand the words uttered.¹⁷ Adorno¹⁸ qualifies authentic art as something that forces “active engagement,” in this case, from listeners.

Other writers offer definitions that are entirely different, some completely contradicting Moore’s three definitions: Auslander¹⁹ introduces the “logic of authentic inauthenticity,” arguing that inauthenticity is a verifiable form of authenticity. This is to say that when artists cannot conform to definitions of authenticity of Moore’s sort, the only way they can be called authentic is by an admission of their inauthenticity; Potter²⁰ offers definitions inspired by Walter Benjamin’s “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.” Being different and sometimes contradictory to Moore’s definitions, they support Auslander’s to some degree, but are equally valid and important for considering extra-musical aspects. Potter considers the idea of the “creative self,” whereby the authentic self is an “artistic project,” using one’s own creative powers to provide meaning. As he puts it, “co-optation” refers to the idea that an artist can earn a false attribution for a genre or deliberately misrepresent it. Potter sees this as a kind of authenticity whereby in the process of “stealing” from another genre or artist, the artist/artwork can come to be recognised as authentic in being mistaken for the original, or through placing their own twist on it. According to Potter, “form” is the musician’s “sound,” that makes their work uniquely theirs so that their style can change while their underlining “form” remains consistent. Having a “presence in time and space” is a mark of authenticity, whereby the artist/artwork traces a journey through time and space that cannot be replicated by any other artist/artwork. “Aura” embeds the artist in a “fabric of tradition,” deeply connected to a specific time and purpose. “Cultivation of a deliberate scarcity” is a

¹⁶ Sarah Rubidge, Devereux, Dillane and Power eds., *Bowie: Critical Perspectives*, 57.

¹⁷ Moore, “Authenticity as Authentication,” 209.

¹⁸ Theodor Adorno, Devereux, Dillane and Power eds., *Bowie: Critical Perspectives* 287.

¹⁹ Auslander, So-Rim Lee, “Bowie’s Authentic Inauthenticity.”

²⁰ Andrew Potter, *The Authenticity Hoax: How we Got Lost Finding Ourselves* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2011), 76-102.

process of authentication undertaken by the artist to ensure they produce an “irreproducible work” and maintain an “aura.”

So far, I have demonstrated how authenticity can be defined in many different ways. It is important to note that each definition has its limitations when applied to a certain concept, art form/artist and authenticity lies within a broad spectrum of concepts and ideas that attempt to define something that in itself is difficult to define. In the next chapter, following a short account of his beginnings, I will apply the three principle definitions to Bowie and point to the problems of authenticity thorough some of Bowie’s inherent features.

Chapter two: David Bowie and the problem of authenticity

There are many things worth mentioning in relation to Bowie's early life, which shaped his artistry and music. Born on 8th January 1947 in Brixton, London, six years later, his family moved to Bromley, Kent. He took an interest in artists such as Elvis Presley and Little Richard at an early age. His friendship with George Underwood led him to take up the saxophone and form *The Konrads*. On 12th February 1962, he and Underwood got into a fight over a girl, leaving Bowie with an eye injury. Hospitalized for weeks and away from school, his anisocoria began to make him feel like an outsider.

Shortly after leaving school he started working at Nevundy-Hurst Commercial art studios in Old Bond Street London as a paste-up artist, preparing artwork for printing. Working there taught him the "potency of image,"²¹ that became crucial to his success and personal flair. Two years later, he adopted the name "Bowie," after a knife with a double-edged blade.

American culture, literature, art and theatre contributed to his all-round artistry. His acting career and interest in mime and dance were boosted by his encounter with actor, mime artist, choreographer and dancer Lindsay Kemp. It is perhaps his interest in all-round entertainer Anthony Newley that was the most influential, introducing not just a vocal model with vaudevillian cockney panache, but also "...theatre, stagecraft, choreography, grotesque characterization, winsome narrative, make-up and mime to David at a crucial stage in his development."²²

Though these points may seem irrelevant to a musical exploration of Bowie, being aware of his all-round artistry as he engages in a variety of media, is key to understanding how, if in any way at all, Bowie, and multifaceted artists in general, can be deemed authentic.

²¹ Doggett, Peter, "David Bowie," *Esquire*, January/February, 2016, 101.

²² Cann, *Bowie: Any Day Now*, 107.

David Bowie and first person authenticity

To consider David Bowie “first person” authentic, there must be indication that both he and his musical output reflects an originality that he alone has created and more importantly, that it reflects who he truly is. This may be a problematic path to follow, however, there are a couple of ways we can consider this point.

It is believed that in the 60s, a new kind of artist, writing and performing their own work, began to emerge, putting to shame those performing songs handed to them by record companies. Considering how much the rise of the singer-songwriter²³ contributed to first person authenticity, Bowie, an example of such an artist, must be considered. In fact, Baker²⁴ suggests that Bowie takes on the modernist singer-songwriter identity in order to project postmodern ideas. He argues that Bowie expresses views and ideas that do not coincide with, and are perhaps ahead of, their time. Bowie²⁵ notes this himself about his work: “the sensibility that comes over is some feeling of nostalgia for a future...it creeps into everything I do.”

A more personal, self-expressive kind of musical output is arguably found in Bowie as a singer-songwriter. *Letter to Hermione* is an example. Its lyrics offer blatant outpourings of his pure distraught state, uncovering his pain, rejection and doubt to his ex-girlfriend. O’Leary²⁶ says of the song: “Here at last, we believe Bowie took off the mask - here is the true Bowie, dripping out his heart accompanied by guitar, so much that the song should have been credited to David Jones.” Though this kind of vulnerable, truthful, intimate self-expression is possibly rare in Bowie songs, here we can witness and perhaps relate Bowie’s through personal heartbreak, a common life experience, openly declaring his feelings.

²³ Barker and Taylor, *Faking it*, 188-189.

²⁴ David Baker, Toija Cinque, Christopher Moore and Sean Redmond eds., *Enchanting David Bowie: space/time/body/memory*, New York/London: Bloomsbury Publishing Inc, 2015.

²⁵ Devereux, Dillane and Power eds., *Bowie: Critical Perspectives*, 86.

²⁶ Chris O’Leary, “Letter to Hermione,” *Pushing ahead of the Dame, David Bowie, song by song*, November 16, 2009, accessed December 30, 2015, <https://bowiesongs.wordpress.com/?s=letter+to+hermione>.

According to Bickerdicke and Sparrowhawk,²⁷ whilst living in Berlin, Bowie became his authentic self. This is expressed in two ways: Bowie was an “existential tourist” escaping to Berlin in the hope of finding a greater reality than that he has been experiencing before and he was “everyman,” leading an ordinary, unglamorous existence, stripped down to normality, thus potentially supporting a return to first person authenticity.

David Bowie and second person authenticity

Second person authenticity involves considering how Bowie could be the face of something relatable on a grand scale, of a cause, or a universal message, or describing common situations. Immediately, one can point to *Letter to Hermione*. However, Stark²⁸ notes something far more profound: drawing on Jungian philosophy, she claims that Bowie is a “visionary artist,” who “[manifested] archetypal themes that resonate across cultures.” Some of Bowie’s songs make reference to Jungian theories and potentially promote him as the “visionary artist.” *Oh! You Pretty Things* references Jung in the lyrics: “Look out my window, what do I see? A crack in the sky and a hand reaching down to me.”²⁹

Perhaps a raw authenticity emerges from Bowie, using music to channel a quest for truth from the depths of human experience. However, how does *Oh! You Pretty Things* relate to second person authenticity? The chorus points towards the song’s central theme: that parenthood forces one to make way for the next generation, “homo superior.”³⁰ Thus, whilst retelling his own fears about becoming a father, he arguably represents every father-to-be. Chapman³¹, however, describes the song’s theme as “generational alienation,” whereby the current young glam rock fans are of concern to their parents - “Don’t you know you’re driving your mamas and papas insane?” -

²⁷ Cinque, Moore and Redmond eds., *Enchanting David Bowie*, 54, 50.

²⁸Ibid., 85.

²⁹Ibid., 88.

³⁰O’Leary, “Oh! You pretty things.”

³¹ Ian Chapman, “Experiencing David Bowie: A Listener’s Companion,” 27, accessed December 30, 2015,

https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=zaMICgAAQBAJ&pg=PA27&lpg=PA27&dq=oh+you+pretty+things+new+generation+of+glam+rock+fans&source=bl&ots=07vLNZdEvo&sig=R84_4JXYpCc56Ld6coAX5Vkgbs&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwji362K14PKAhUGShQKHQmhCfcQ6AEIzAA#v=one_page&q=oh%20you%20pretty%20things%20new%20generation%20of%20glam%20rock%20fans&f=false.

when showing an unusual interest in makeup and bold clothing. He notes how these fans could identify with this song, feeling misunderstood.

It could be said that, through this song, Bowie has achieved second person authenticity by representing the generations of the parent and of the young, rebellious teenager. It is possible to believe that Bowie becomes an agency of social mobility³² through his music and image within his various guises. Further to the idea of Bowie's representational authenticity, perhaps Benjamin's notion of a "presence in time and space"³³ as a mark of authenticity could contribute.

Could it be that Bowie simultaneously achieved a "presence in time and space" and second person authenticity? For Bowie,³⁴ *Low* is representative of the divided city of Berlin at the time of its creation. The LP consists of two sides, one with songs and one with instrumentals. Bowie intended it as a black and white division between the free West and the repressed East sides of the wall. He described the meanings of the individual tracks for *Record Mirror* in 1977: *Subterraneans* concerns "the people who got caught in East Berlin," reflected in the faint jazz saxophones as a representation of "the memory of what it was;" *Art Decade* is "West Berlin - a city cut off from its world, art and culture, dying with no hope of retribution;" and *Weeping Wall* illustrates the "misery of" the Berlin Wall. Therefore, *Low* potentially possesses a "presence in time and space", standing for a repressed generation of Berliners, and became representative of that period in Berlin's history.

Perhaps we could also argue that Bowie displays a representational authenticity through making an impact on a social space using hypothetical spaces. Citing Doyle (2005) and Deleuze and Guatari (1987), Lupro³⁵ argues that music has "the capacity...to mark and map territory [which] can have material consequences in place (sic.) and space-making." He states that Bowie "has used space as a place to locate

³² Michael Bracewell, *Re-make, Re-model: Art, Pop, Fashion and the Making of Roxy Music, 1953-1972* (London: Faber, 2007), 31, 33.

³³ Potter, *The Authenticity Hoax*, 96-97.

³⁴ Tobias Ruther, *Heroes: David Bowie and Berlin*, London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2014, 52.

³⁵ Cinque, Moore and Redmond eds, *Enchanting David Bowie*, 17, 14.

difference...unbound by terrestrial norms of comportment and expression."³⁶ Through *Space Oddity* and Major Tom, Bowie produces a hypothetical cultural space that ensures "future space cultures are more equitable and more socially just than previous human frontiers."³⁷ Perhaps, through this hypothetical outer space where humanity has advanced significantly, he represents a future space and supports a cause that seeks to improve human life. In doing so, he draws attention to life on earth can be improved. Cagle and Auslander, too, argue that both the lyrics and music of *Space Oddity* have the ability to create a space where awareness of the fear of "technological nihilism" is raised.³⁸ Therefore, Bowie also represents significant issues in the modern world, arguably promoting a desire to resolve them.

So far, Bowie has been shown to embody representational authenticity through becoming the face of a generation, representing an historic period, a repressed nation and a space where humanity is improved, creating a space where differences can be articulated, and giving a voice to minority communities. I will now explore how Bowie does so by directly addressing political and cultural issues through a persona and one of his songs.

Chambers³⁹ claims that Bowie takes on a "sensationalist aesthetic of the strange," by reconstructing himself through culture. He mentions Ziggy Stardust, a persona that being an androgynous alien, symbolises the cultural and social outcast. Might many people relate to Ziggy?

³⁶ Cinque, Moore and Redmond eds, *Enchanting David Bowie*, 17, 14.

³⁷ Ibid., 16-17.

³⁸ Ibid., 17-18.

³⁹ Nick Stevenson, *David Bowie: Fame, Sound and Vision*, (UK/USA: Polity Press, 2006), 56.

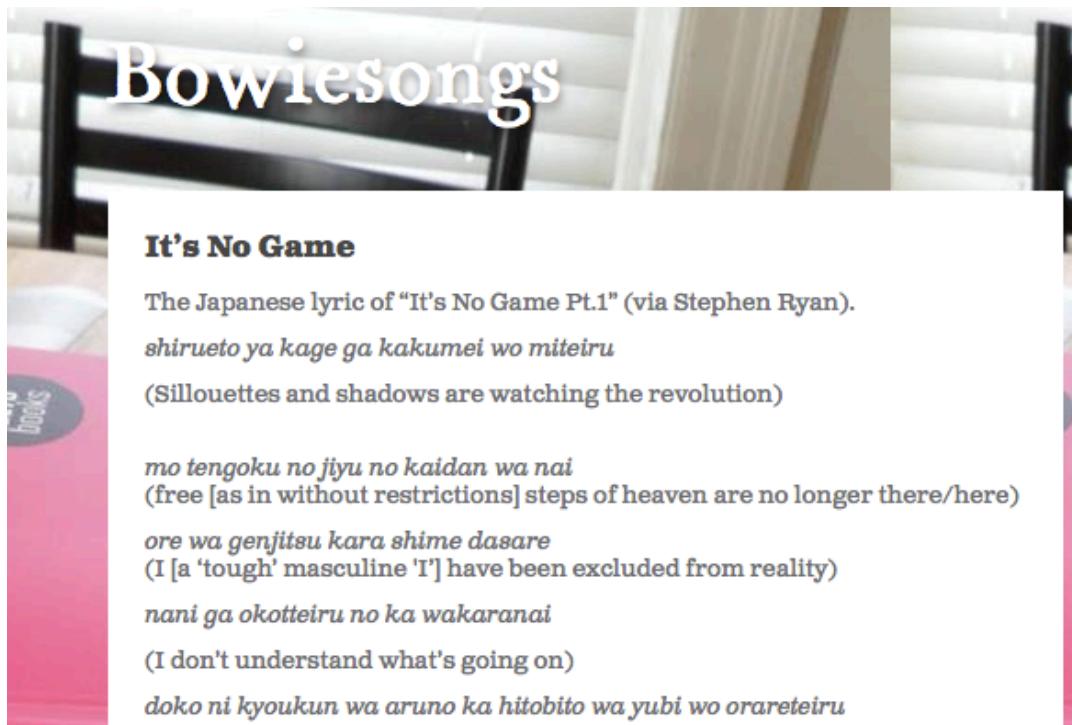


Figure 1: *It's No Game*, Bowiesongs, accessed April 8, 2016,

<http://bowiesongs.tumblr.com/post/8643857806/its-no-game>.

It's no game (Part 1) from *Scary Monsters and Super Creeps* (1980) makes reference to fascist politics and challenges Japanese cultural norms to make a political point. At the beginning of the song, Japanese actress Michi Hirota shouts the lyrics in a harsh tone. They are translated into a Japanese that a teenage boy or older man would most likely use, never a female, as Japanese is defined by gender. For a woman to speak in this way would be considered uncouth. Arguably, Bowie is using Hirota and the song as a face for challenging Japanese gender norms and sexist attitudes to women: “I wanted to break down a particular type of sexist attitude about women. I thought the [idea of] the “Japanese girl” typifies it, where everyone pictures them as a geisha girl, very sweet, demure and non-thinking, when in fact that’s the absolute opposite of what women are like.”⁴⁰ Furthermore, the lyrics feel like those of a protest song, at one point referring to fascism: “To be insulted by these fascists, it’s so degrading.” O’Leary⁴¹ interprets the narrative as one of a man watching several scenes unfolding on television, yet remaining forcibly detached from them himself. Both this Orwellian

⁴⁰ Chris O’Leary, “It’s no game,” *Pushing ahead of the Dame, David Bowie, song by song*, August 8, 2011, accessed December 30, 2015, <https://bowiesongs.wordpress.com/2011/08/08/its-no-game-pts-1-2/>.

⁴¹ Ibid.

scene, and that created by Hirota are perhaps relatable for many.

David Bowie and third person authenticity

Bowie can be shown to encompass a cultural integrity through much of his work, referencing musical traditions connected to his own culture. In particular, he regularly references people and musical styles that influenced him in youth. The influence of music hall on his songs is evident, especially in *David Bowie*, as is the vocal style of Anthony Newley, in songs such as *Silly Boy Blue* and *Maid of Bond Street*.

Frith⁴² suggests something inherent the third person authenticity in Bowie, his music and its engagement with his culture. He dubs him “the quintessential suburban star,” claiming that it was a given, due to where he grew up, that he should become a popular music star. He states that the Bromley Bowie grew up in was “probably the most significant suburb in pop history,” meaning that it produced many pop stars of today, and also a kind of “modern sensibility.”

David Bowie, authenticity and the outsider

Above, I discussed how Bowie fits into definitions of first, second and third person authenticity, but only in reference to one at a time. Here, through the persona of the outsider, I aim to demonstrate how he fits into all three at once.

After developing anisocoria, Bowie began to feel like an outsider, an issue addressed frequently in his songs through personae such as the androgynous alien, Ziggy Stardust. As Bowie’s career progressed, it could be argued that he addressed issues relating to sexuality, class, and culture through which outsiders are considered, thus taking on a representational authenticity. Frith⁴³ concurs, stating: “Bowie’s fans have always identified with him particularly intensely, because no one else has captured so well their sense of difference.”

⁴² Cinque, Moore and Redmond eds, *Enchanting David Bowie*, 34.

⁴³ Chapman, “Experiencing David Bowie,” xxv.

In relation to Bowie's eyes, it could be suggested that Bowie becomes biologically authentic, particularly alongside images and song topics that embody the outsider. Hunt⁴⁴ states that "Bowie's anisocoria is a real and authentic part of his biology." Bowie seems to exploit it to a great extent in the artwork and lyrics of *Blackstar*. Perhaps in using his biological identity as a topic, explored through his music and personal branding, and in juxtaposing these qualities, for the only time in all his records, he embodies the outsider at the core of his being in more than one respect.

Nette⁴⁵ points to one of Bowie's literary influences, *The Outsider* by Colin Wilson, a book of cultural and personal significance. In referencing it, through himself and his work, Bowie arguably takes on a cultural authenticity. Therefore, in considering how Bowie embodies the outsider aesthetic, he can be further shown to embody a representational authenticity.

So far, I have analysed how Bowie could be defined as authentic within Moore's definitions. However, these definitions alone are not sufficient. They required further supplementing from other sources, because although Bowie has been shown to possess first, second and third person authenticity, the same methods used to show how he does so could also be used to show how he does not.

Earlier, it was argued that such personal songs as *Letter to Hermione* are rare in Bowie, because most of his songs do not refer to his personal life. For him to be "first person" authentic, this would have to be a characteristic of many of his songs. Furthermore, it would have to be clear that Bowie is singing them as his true self, not a persona. The argument that Bowie represents causes and people in certain songs is only one possible interpretation, and Bowie does not make it clear-cut that he does. Therefore, this is not sufficient evidence of his second person authenticity. Bowie also references traditions from other cultures that are not true to his personal cultural experience, including soul. In doing so, he does not consistently represent a single

⁴⁴ Kevin J. Hunt, Cinque, Moore and Redmond eds, *Enchanting David Bowie*, 187

⁴⁵ Andrew Nette, "Librarian with a sex drive," *Wheeler Centre*, August 6, 2015, accessed October 11, 2015, <http://www.wheelercentre.com/notes/librarian-with-a-sex-drive>.

style or its origins. This could identify him as mere co-optation or pastiche and therefore not as “third person” authentic.

When personal authenticity was first brought up, it mentioned three features that reflect this definition: that Bowie and his musical output must present something original; that the work must be entirely his own and that he and his music must reflect his true self. It also mentioned features of cultural and representational authenticity: Bowie must present his own culture in a truthful and integral way, and he must represent a people or a cause honestly and truthfully. The ways in which he breaks down these criteria are: the polysemous work of art, the amalgam and the co-opted artist.

The polysemous work of art

“we don’t expect our audience to necessarily seek an explanation from ourselves. We assign that role to the listener and to culture...All art is unstable. Its meaning is not necessarily that implied by the author. There is no authoritative voice, there are only multiple readings.”⁴⁶ This quote explains how Bowie wants his work and, arguably, himself to be interpreted: in whatever way the listener wishes. Barthes⁴⁷ writes that “the “grain” is the body in the voice as it sings, the hand as it writes, the limb as it performs...And listening to this grain, I am determined to listen to my relation with the body of the man or woman singing or playing.” Thus, not only Bowie’s work but he himself also becomes a text to be interpreted. This lack of a set meaning or source of meaning brings up a problem with authenticity: how can one ascribe it to an artist or work whose own identity cannot be uniformly interpreted? And how can one ascribe it when the author claims no authority over himself or his work? Bowie aside, it seems there are inherent issues with authenticity in relation to polysemy, a common feature of much music. Ali and Wallace⁴⁸ refer to Barthes, noting how, through polysemy, an artist renders focus not on themselves or their work, but on the reader: “but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader...not the author...a text’s unity lies not in its origin but in its destination.”

⁴⁶ David Bowie, 1996, Devereux, Dillane and Power eds., *Bowie: Critical Perspectives*, 2.

⁴⁷ Roland Barthes, Devereux, Dillane and Power eds. *Bowie: Critical Perspectives*, 269.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

It seems impossible to offer a single interpretation of Bowie, that interpretation being that he is “authentic,” when he does not define himself. To know and be able to state whether his work truly expresses himself or attempts to represent his culture is not possible when Bowie refuses to declare the intentions behind his work. Therefore, being polysemous in nature, Bowie and his work remain as open to being deemed authentic, as to being deemed “inauthentic.”

The amalgam



Figure 2: Nigel French, “Bowie Map,” nigelfrench, accessed December 31, 2015,

<http://nigelfrench.bigcartel.com/product/bowie-map>.

Bracewell⁴⁹ mentions how Bryan Ferry creates an amalgam of received ideas, cultural references and an accumulation of influences that become of significance for the shaping of *Roxy Music*. The same could be said of Bowie could it not?

Figure 2 attempts to illustrate how Bowie draws on many disciplines, experiences and cultures. As he himself puts it: “Sometimes I don’t feel as if I’m a person at all...I’m just a collection of other people’s ideas.”⁵⁰ Laing and Frith⁵¹ agree stating: “Bowie constructs his music around an image rather than a sound or a style.” These differences in image and sound can be observed between his albums, between songs on the same album and sometimes within songs, but one of the most distinctive ways he amalgamates is through the persona.

Bowie once stated: “One of the principles of rock is that it’s the person himself expressing what he really and truly feels and that applies to a lot of artists. But to me it doesn’t. I always saw it as a theatrical experience.”⁵² Bowie has built musical narratives around personae from the days of *The Hype*, when he became *Rainbowman*.⁵³ Since Ziggy Stardust, they have possessed as much of a cultivated musical style and voice as an image. Ziggy had bright red hair, a pale, made-up face like a doll, and wore high boots and a tight spandex suit. He was created alongside a narrative where Ziggy aimed to achieve fame and immortality through rock. His image came to be known as “glam rock,” his voice, catalogued by Kardos as a “crooning” sound.⁵⁴ Bowie says: “From make-up to costume [Lindsay Kemp’s] ideas of an elevated reality stuck and his commitment to breaking down the parameters between on-stage and off-stage life remained firmly in my soul.”⁵⁵ Moreover, Ziggy is represented onstage ambiguously: Bowie sings sometimes as Ziggy, sometimes about Ziggy as the narrator, but dressed as Ziggy. A key feature of Bowie’s personae is their

⁴⁹ Bracewell, *Re-make, Re-model*, 37-38.

⁵⁰ Cinque, Moore and Redmond eds, *Enchanting David Bowie*, 105.

⁵¹ David Laing and Simon Frith, Devereux, Dillane and Power eds. *Bowie: Critical Perspectives*, 231.

⁵² David Bowie, *Ibid.*, 240.

⁵³ David Buckley, *Strange Fascination: David Bowie: The Definitive Story* (London: Virgin Books Ltd, 2005), 76.

⁵⁴ Leah Kardos, “General Bowie Vocalisations vs Song Content,” 2015.

⁵⁵ David Bowie, Hewitt, *Bowie: Album by Album*, 30.

changes or lack of gender. According to Bradley and Page,⁵⁶ Bowie sees in the “end of gender.” Where Ziggy Stardust embodies elements of masculinity and femininity, Bowie’s 1980s mainstream, effeminate, high fashion “New Man” model embraces a new kind of masculinity, going against the idealised “strong man.” On balance, the persona seems the perfect antithesis to authenticity, does it not? Bowie’s amalgamation of personae and images, from which he constructs his many different sounds appear to make it difficult to render him authentic.

To Bowie personae became far more than characters to portray onstage or in his music. He played them at every moment and became them. In interviews with high-profile magazines, he maintained their voices and personalities. Usher and Fremaux⁵⁷ describe this as a “blurring of the private and public self.” Using Hegel’s theory of the “master/slave,” they claim that Bowie became a slave to his guises, and came to believe he was them. Bowie admitted so in his liner notes for a 1972 album, “It’s no longer an act; I am him.”⁵⁸

Many of Bowie’s fans are also fooled by his guises. A sketch Bowie performs called *The Mask*⁵⁹ is a perfect illustration of the point. Bowie’s final line in the film is “But nobody ever mentioned anything about a mask.” He has worn this mask for so long that his audience has failed to notice it, and when he tries to return to normality, he is unable to.

Using Bakhtin’s theorization, Brooker⁶⁰ attempts to offer a distinction between the private self (David Jones), the public author (David Bowie) and the personae. Yet, as

⁵⁶ Bradley, Peri and James Page, “David Bowie: The End of Gender? An investigation of Bowie’s Impact on the Shift of Masculinity and Gender performance from 1970 to the present day,” presentation delivered at ACMI, Melbourne, 18th July, 2015.

⁵⁷ Devereux, Dillane and Power eds., *Bowie: Critical Perspectives*, 58.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ VultureCabaret “David Bowie - The Mask,” metacafe video February 2013, accessed April 8, 2016, http://www.metacafe.com/watch/9932508/david_bowie_the_mask/.

⁶⁰ Will Brooker, Aisha Gani, “Ch-Ch-Ch-Changes: academic to spend year as David Bowie’s many personas,” *The Guardian*, August 18, 2015, accessed November 11, 2015.

<http://www.theguardian.com/music/2015/aug/18/ch-ch-ch-changes-academic-to-spend-year-as-david-bowies-many-personas>.

Bowie states of his work, Bakhtin⁶¹ says that no matter the point of view he takes, be it of the narrator, or the author, the author “remains outside the world he has represented in his work.” Supporting this, Frith⁶² notes how personae objectify “the artist as the medium of the art” and “subjectify the artist at the site of the narrative.” Thus, if one constantly asks “who is Bowie and who is Ziggy, if not Bowie?” surely this lack of objectivity makes ascribing authenticity to any artist seem impossible?

Bowie’s amalgamated nature seems to pose problems when attempting to regard him as authentic: if Bowie draws on such a wide range of sources for inspiration, surely this makes a strong case against his originality, his exclusive authorship and of his self-expressive qualities? Furthermore, how can be culturally authentic when he draws mainly on other cultures? In addition, through combining a range of influences, he arguably represents no single people or cause, and so cannot possess representational authenticity. Lastly, nothing seems consistent about his person, gender, image or musical output. His ensemble of monikers and his gender fluidity make it problematic to proclaim any kind of self-origination, or name his work as reflecting his true self (since it seems impossible to know what that is) or that he is expressing his own culture or clearly representing one single thing. Overall, his use of amalgamation only seems to add to a sense of constructed artifice, rather than of authenticity.

The co-opted artist

Bowie seems not only to consist of different influences, images and genders, but also to adopt many musical styles. Using Potter’s⁶³ term, Bowie co-opts these styles, entire genres even, being mistakenly hailed as their originator, yet perhaps inventing his own in the process.

In *Young Americans*, Bowie, it seems, makes every possible effort to embody the sound of soul, taking on three backing singers with roots in soul. Again, a case can be made in favour of defaming Bowie’s authenticity when he is clearly imitating a genre. Could it be argued, however, that Bowie creates his own genre, or at least his own

⁶¹ Cinque, Moore and Redmond eds, *Enchanting David Bowie*, 98-99.

⁶² Simon Frith, *Ibid.*, 58-59.

⁶³ Potter, *The Authenticity Hoax*, 82.

version of it, dubbed by some “plastic” or “white” soul, a white man with a black vocal quality?

Potter argues that co-optation is a kind of authenticity, stating that “an authentic artform emerges organically out of a given subcultural milieu.”⁶⁴ This suggests that, at least in terms of culture, there may be no such thing as an original artwork. In the case of Bowie, it suggests that an authenticity can be ascribed to him, but perhaps not quite the kind Moore or any authors of a similar view describe.

⁶⁴ Potter, *The Authenticity Hoax*, 82.

Chapter 3: David Bowie's Authenticity

So far, I have attempted to evaluate Bowie's authenticity as an artist and an author through three “traditional” theorizations rooted in the ideology of authentic rock, or authenticity in general. This chapter, will present alternative definitions of authenticity and how they can be applied to Bowie.

The rise and fall of David Bowie and his authenticity

Many authors and fans of Bowie has claimed that he reached a creative peak in his *Ziggy Stardust* phase, and that from the 1980s or 90s, his creativity and authenticity took a profound dip. Such value judgments may be based on nostalgia for one Bowie as opposed to another, suggesting how some fans are not comfortable with the idea of Bowie's ever-changing aesthetic, choosing to select one version of himself as the genuine article, as *The Mask* demonstrates.

According to some critics and fans who dislike the Bowie of the 1980s onwards, he made an uncharacteristic shift to the commercial mainstream, and in albums such as *Never Let Me Down* and *Tonight* Bowie lost his creative spark. Although it may be that Bowie was less inventive then, it could be argued, first and foremost, that some claims fail to consider whether Bowie was simply using his mainstream self as yet another guise, beneath which he continued a discourse present even in his Ziggy self.

Secondly, as Behr⁶⁵ suggests of collective settings, one could consider Bowie's single commercial image as an agent for the recognition of his musical form. His success may be independent of attempts to be commercial or contrarily, to be “anti-establishment” or appealing to “high art.” Brooker⁶⁶ puts this as Bowie achieving a “balance between...a necessary commercial pragmatism and a core of personal authenticity.”

Lastly, some, including Bowie, note how he finds himself again, regains an authenticity perhaps, through a temporary re-engagement with a collective setting in

⁶⁵ Behr, “Join Together with the Band.”

⁶⁶ Will Brooker, Aisha Gani, “Ch-Ch-Ch-Changes.”

the band *Tin Machine*. Perhaps here it may be appropriate to apply Behr's⁶⁷ notion of a “collective” or “first person plural” authenticity.

Bowie and his collaborators: a collective authenticity

The commercial failure of *Tin Machine* was possibly fortunate for Bowie, freeing him from the commercial pressures he had faced since his Ziggy days. However, it was not at the end of his time with the band but during the process of engaging with it that he believed that he had regained something: “It accomplished exactly what it was supposed to do, which was bring me back to my absolute roots and set me back on the right course of what I do best.”⁶⁸ Perhaps we can see the *Tin Machine* phase as a turning point for Bowie, who, working in a collective setting, away from a mainstream audience, found alternative ways of achieving authenticity that stayed with him for the rest of his career.

Considering Behr's notion that a band, as a collective agent, can achieve authenticity through evolving a collective image, projected alongside a series of musical expressions embedded in musical culture, that help it gain recognition, perhaps the group setting reminded Bowie of elements he used previously to forge his artistic self. For example, his times as a saxophonist with *The Konrads* may have reignited his desire to play the saxophone in a band. In fact, some believe *Tin Machine* were pioneers in the development of alternative rock.⁶⁹ Perhaps in this way, the band earned a collective authenticity through contributing to the field of rock music at large. Others argue to the contrary, suggesting that *Tin Machine* was simply another of Bowie's masks, and that it reinvented “rock inauthenticity after its deconstruction.”⁷⁰ In the *Tin Machine* phase his image was “stripped back,” free of the multifaceted front that he had as a soloist. Conversely, could it be that Behr's notion is still applicable to Bowie as a soloist engaging with recurring collaborators such as Brian Eno and Tony Visconti?

⁶⁷ Behr, “Join Together with the Band.”

⁶⁸ David Bowie, Devereux, Dillane and Power eds. *Bowie: Critical Perspectives*, 67.

⁶⁹ David Buckley, *David Bowie: The Music and the Changes* (London: Omnibus Press, 2015), 86.

⁷⁰ Stevenson, *Bowie: Fame*, 105.

Both Eno and Visconti have worked with Bowie on several projects, spanning several decades, which may have helped define his sound and give his work a sense of stability. Visconti has been musician, producer and collaborator with Bowie for most of his career, even on his most recent album, *Blackstar*. One could argue that through such a long-term relationship, he has come to know Bowie's creative vision and ethos, and that in doing so, he has played a part in shaping it. Visconti has also come to know how best to record and mix Bowie's tracks, and in particular, his voice. As he puts it: "I used...[the Telefunken ELAM 251 microphone] on Bowie's voice, and he...sounded beautiful on it because he's got low end in his voice, but the high end on that mic is brilliant, too, so the vocalist leaps out at you." He also claims to use compression no higher than 10db, and at a ratio of 3:1, and flanging, as he records.⁷¹ Therefore, together, Visconti and Bowie are perhaps achieving both a collective and a technologically mediated authenticity.

Hawkins⁷² notes how the singing voice is an "integral part of individual agency," thus a marker of authenticity, in terms of unmediated expression. If considering how the voice and therefore properties that make the voice authentic could be enhanced through technology, perhaps it could be argued that Visconti's ability to enhance Bowie's vocality through production achieves authenticity through its technological enhancement. More broadly speaking, his approaches to recording and mixing Bowie suggest that has a profound understanding of the semiotics of his voice and his compositional intentions, thus achieving authenticity through a shared collective vision.

Perhaps a good example of both these authenticities being articulated is *Heroes*. Visconti⁷³ emphasized the expanding emotional density of the song and Bowie's vocal by using the mics in a creative way:

⁷¹ Stan Hawkins, "Singing the Body Fantastic: Corporeality and the Voice," *The British Pop Dandy, Masculinity, Popular Music and Culture*, (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2009), 145-146.

⁷² Ibid, 121.

⁷³ Tony Visconti, Richard Buskin, "Classic tracks: Heroes," *Sound on Sound*, October 2004, accessed December 30, 2015, <http://www.soundonsound.com/sos/oct04/articles/classictracks.htm>.

“Mic number one was a valve U47, and with the other two on gates I made sure that number two, an 87 placed about 15 feet away from him, would go on at a certain level, while the third mic... all the way at the other end of the room, didn't open up until he really sang loud. That reverb on his voice is therefore the room itself, none of it is artificial, and it is his voice triggering the gates. What is really great is that the sound of the opening two verses is really intimate...it sounds like somebody...singing about a foot away from your ear...I can tell you he was feeling it. It was quite an emotional song for him to sing, he deliberated long and hard over these lyrics, and he was ready to go, there was no holding him back.”

Visconti chose to save the mic that was furthest away until the most dramatic point of the vocal. His use of levels and mics relative to the vocal's intensity arguably exposes his sensitivity to Bowie's intentions conveyed in the vocal itself, also reflecting Visconti's sensitivity to the track itself, which repeats the same melodic ideas with increasing intensity. Therefore, perhaps one can identify a collective authenticity constructed by Bowie and Visconti.

Besides helping shape Bowie's creativity, Visconti offers certain audible characteristics in Bowie's tracks, even decades apart. This, it could be argued, helps create a recognizable, albeit subtle, continuity, in his work. One example is his use of the “cavernous drum”⁷⁴ aesthetic, invented during his work on *Low*. In *The Next Day*, produced 36 years later, one can clearly hear the same drum sound on tracks such as *How does the grass grow?* and *Love is Lost*. The way in which, one could claim, Bowie maintains a sense of consistency and continuity in his sound, despite seeming anything but consistent, is a worthwhile focus for considering authenticity in terms of form.

⁷⁴ Gavin Blackburn, “A trip through Bowie's Berlin,” *DW*, March 2013, accessed December 30, 2015, <http://www.dw.com/en/a-trip-through-bowies-berlin/a-16606407>.

David Bowie and form

“I don’t think I write about a terribly wide range of subjects...and it won’t change very much, because it never has, it appears, from Major Tom to Heathen.”⁷⁵ In this quote, it seems that Bowie is referring to an aspect of his form. Potter⁷⁶ describes form as “the equivalent to...the musician’s “sound.” It is the distinctive use of vocabulary, phrasing, tone...that makes a work uniquely theirs... form is not the same as style...an artist can change styles while their underlying form remains more or less constant...” For Potter, this kind of personal stamp is a kind of authenticity. So how can we go about finding Bowie’s “form?”

“You have to accommodate your pasts within your persona....it helps you reflect on what you are now.”⁷⁷ In the previous section, I explored how through production, Visconti had cultivated a sense of consistency across Bowie’s tracks, entire albums apart. Kardos⁷⁸ notes further examples of this kind in Bowie’s music, naming his method “self-quotation.” She explains how through the re-use of various visual and sonic signifiers he has created over the course of his career, Bowie creates a “sonic and musical vernacular,”⁷⁹ his own language, that draws on to create meanings that, in some cases, can only be created in the very context of his music. This intertextuality, that Bowie creates out of an “economically and artistically sound recycling of poses,”⁸⁰ makes a strong case for identifying his form.

Kardos⁸¹ details three ways in which Bowie offers this consistent thread: use of Lydian/mixolydian modal effect, use of melody, phrasing and prosody, and vocal style(s). Bowie uses the Lydian mode in songs such as *Sue (or in a season of crime)* and those on *1.Outside*. Besides this, he often employs a complex harmonic language, moving beyond the “basic diatonic language” that most contemporary popular music

⁷⁵ David Bowie, 2003, Hewitt, *Bowie: Album by Album*, 249.

⁷⁶ Potter, *The Authenticity Hoax*, 88.

⁷⁷ David Bowie, *Five Years*, BBC One, May 2013.

⁷⁸ Leah Kardos, “Can you hear me? Recurring sonic and musical gestures in the works of David Bowie.” *Leah Kardos*, September 9, 2015, accessed December 30, 2015,

http://www.leahkardos.com/files/Can_You_Hear_Me_bowiesymposium.html.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Leah Kardos, “Vocal styles across Catalogue (sic).”

⁸¹ Kardos, “Can you hear me?”

consists of. Kardos cites the opening chords of *Where are we now?* (2013) as an example:

Figure 3.1: *Where Are We Now*, Hooktheory, <http://www.hooktheory.com/theorytab/view/david-bowie/where-are-we-now>.

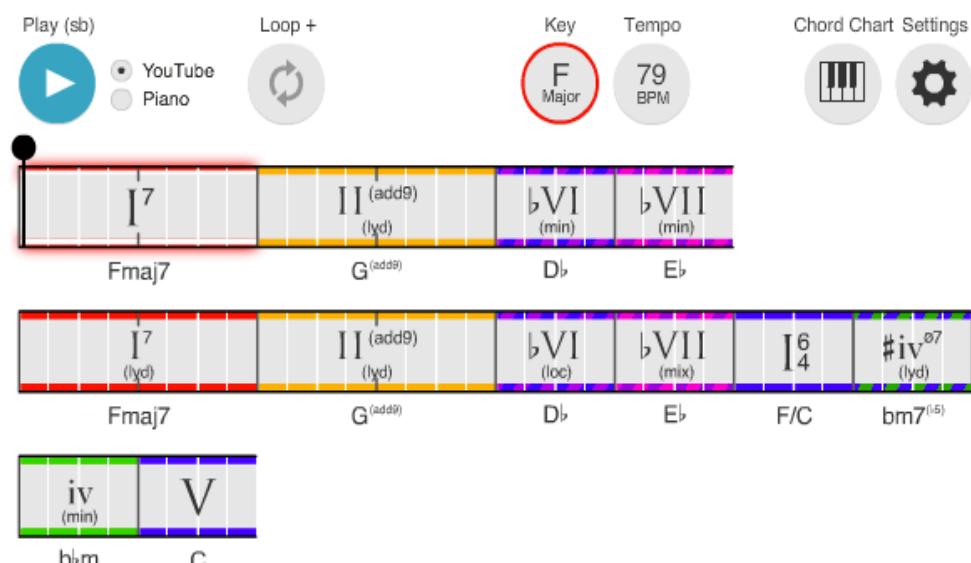
Where Are We Now by David Bowie ☆

Sections: ♦ Intro and Verse.

Contributors: HertzDevil Plus and sus2sus4. Learn how to contribute.

Genres: [Add/Edit ▾]

♦ Intro and Verse



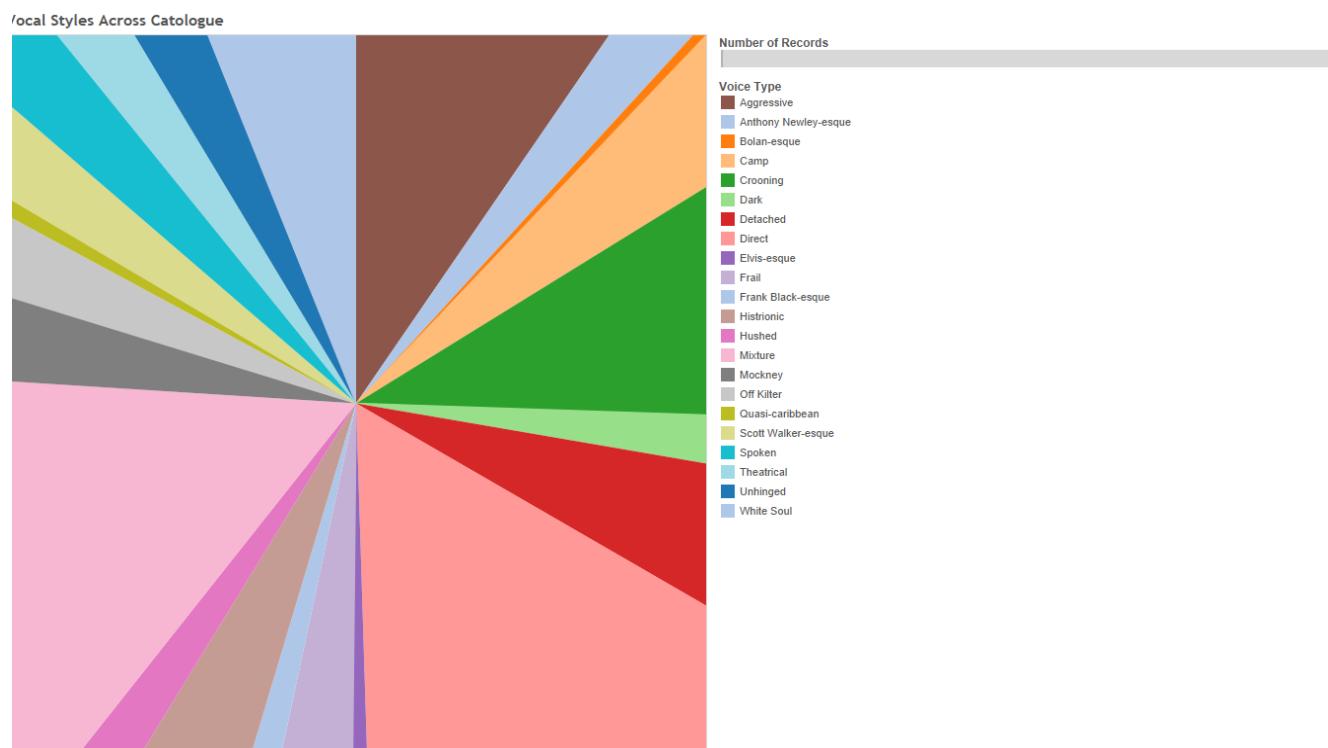
As well as noting how harmonic complexity features in *Tin Machine* albums, Kardos observes how Bowie creates patterns in his songs through use of melody, phrasing and prosody, simultaneously or separately, which become consistent elements. She cites the example of an “arch-shaped”⁸² melody occurring in *Ashes to Ashes*. This can be observed in the opening melody and in the vocal melody of the verses and the chorus.

Prosody is how words are set to a melody, how they scan, and how they set up a listener’s expectations alongside the melody. Kardos draws together several examples,

⁸² Kardos, “Can you hear me?”

including *Saviour Machine* and *A small plot of land*,⁸³ that seem to demonstrate a casual, almost improvised prosody, one where knowing when Bowie will utter the next lyric is uncertain, and in many cases adds to the song's intensity. She assembles several charts displaying the breadth of vocal styles, lyric themes and persona types Bowie engages with time and again, creating an extensive catalogue of sonic and musical gestures. For example, Bowie employs a "crooning" vocal style in *When I live my dream* and *Bring me the disco king*.⁸⁴

Figure 3.2: Leah Kardos, *Vocal Styles Across Catalogue (sic.)*, accessed December 31, 2015, http://www.leahkardos.com/files/Can_You_Hear_Me_bowiesymposium.html.



Moving beyond "self-quotation" several other elements could contribute to Bowie's form. These are his "three-dimensionality," his use of the "cut-up" lyric technique, and his engagement with the topic of mortality.

According to Johnson,⁸⁵ Bowie possesses a three-dimensionality in his work. Through his engagement with music, theatre and film (as well as art, literature and philosophy)

⁸³ Leah Kardos, *Leah Kardos*, accessed December 30, 2015, http://www.leahkardos.com/files/page3_blog_entry178_7.mp3.

⁸⁴ Kardos, "General Bowie Vocalisations."

⁸⁵ Kathryn Johnson, Devereux, Dillane and Power eds. *Bowie: Critical Perspectives*, 11-12.

he presents a vision that has much more of an impact through its aural and visual dimensions.⁸⁶

One of the most distinctive features of some of Bowie's songs is their seemingly nonsensical lyrics. Upon encountering William S. Burroughs, Bowie picks up on his "cut-up" technique, whereby he writes some lyrics, then cuts the words up to separate them and forms new sentences with them, later using *verbasizer* to do so. Buckley⁸⁷ states that the lyrics of *Future Legend* are "particularly Burroughsian," coming across as "fractured and less figurative as images [that] collide with each other in a spiralling non-sequential private universe."

Fleas the size of rats sucked on rats the size of cats
 And ten thousand peoploids split into small tribes
 Coverting the highest of the sterile skyscrapers
 Like packs of dogs assaulting the glass fronts of Love-Me Avenue
 Ripping and rewrapping mink and shiny silver fox, now legwarmers
 Family badge of sapphire and cracked emerald
 Any day now
 The Year of the Diamond Dogs⁸⁸

The topic of mortality is a considerable one for Bowie, who came close to death during his *Reality* tour. It morphs out of an earlier theme concerning a search for identity, as in *Fantastic Voyage*. It seems, particularly since his heart scare, that he uses his musical output to address his fears and awareness that he is approaching death. Songs such as *Look Back in Anger*, *Afraid* and *The Next Day* explore a catastrophic future and a fear of impending death. Stevenson⁸⁹ argues that engagement with this topic was partly fuelled by the Twin Towers attack, witnessed by Bowie's wife. Although hardly original, if we consider Moore's first person authenticity there seems to be something genuine about the connection between Bowie's personal experiences and engagement with his humanity and his choice of subject matter.

⁸⁶ Devereux, Dillane and Power eds. *Bowie: Critical Perspectives*, 11-12.

⁸⁷ Buckley, *Bowie: Music and Changes*, 45.

⁸⁸ Bowie, David, "Future Legend," accessed February 28, 2016,
<http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/davidbowie/futurelegend.html>.

⁸⁹ Nick Stevenson, Devereux, Dillane and Power eds. *Bowie: Critical Perspectives*, 288-289.

Blackstar, his final album, may be the ultimate example of Bowie addressing his fear of dying. Seemingly written upon being made aware of his incurable cancer, *Lazarus*, *Dollar Days* and *I can't give everything away* appear to make reference to his looming death.⁹⁰ Furthermore, what could be more personally authentic, arguably, than a man who knows he is dying singing about his death? One might even hear a frailty in his voice, reflecting his age, decay, and physical and emotional suffering, conveying “unmediated expression.”⁹¹

Many examples demonstrating Bowie’s remarkable qualities have been offered in this chapter. It is important to note that similar attributes could be found in other artists but it may be the way in which they are assembled as a whole that is unique, and that whole could be Bowie’s form, his personal stamp of authenticity. Then again, perhaps Bowie’s “form” is simply Bowie sounding like himself. Alternatively, if focusing on all of Kardos’ points, one might see that although it is possible to find some of the same attributes recurring in Bowie’s music, not a single one seems consistent throughout his catalogue, and therefore that it remains impossible to name a single attribute Bowie’s “form,” apart from this very fact of its inconsistency.

The myth of David Bowie

Many scholars have proposed how Bowie’s musical and public behaviour and his use of image all contribute to an air of mystery about him.

Citing Benjamin, Potter names this a “cultivation of a deliberate scarcity,” which, in turn, helps maintain an “aura.” Exploring the various ways in which scholars have identified cultivated scarcity in Bowie, I will attempt to argue how it helps Bowie maintain his own authenticity.

Several writers have made similar points to Potter in their own ways. Stevenson⁹² notes a process of mythologisation, whereby Bowie’s “shifting quest of identity” -

⁹⁰ Kendall Deflin, “A Lyrical Interpretation of ★ as David Bowie’s Final Masterpiece,” *Live For Live Music*, January 11, 2016, accessed April 8, 2016, <http://liveforlivemusic.com/album-reviews/a-lyrical-interpretation-of-as-david-bowies-final-masterpiece/>.

⁹¹ Moore, “Authenticity as Authentication,” 212.

⁹² Nick Stevenson, Devereux, Dillane and Power eds. *Bowie: Critical Perspectives*, 282-283.

identity to Hall⁹³ being “the process of becoming rather than being” - is one of a constant change of who he is, never fixed or identifiable. Hebdige⁹⁴ recounts an “aesthetic of escape,” whereby through the androgynous persona, found in alter egos such as Ziggy Stardust and Aladdin Sane, Bowie creates a “meta-message” for class, sex, gender and personality. Evident, perhaps, in songs such as *Rebel, Rebel* and *Boys Keep Swinging*, this relates to the identity of the “outsider.” However, it may be that Bowie manifests a sense of his own personal escape in his work, as well as on a dimension to which others can relate.

I would extend Bowie’s cultivated scarcity to his overall conduct. Examples can be found in his music, on album covers and his behaviour towards the media. Considering that the voice may be a strong marker of authenticity and identity in an artist and that Bowie possesses a rich diversity of voices across his catalogue then perhaps the absence of his voice could also be considered a statement of authenticity. In *Low*, Bowie first explored the notion that “saying nothing was the loudest sound of all,”⁹⁵ through instrumental tracks. This absence of his voice on the second side of the album helps evoke unease in a repressed part of Berlin, and simultaneously brings out a new side to Bowie. In a similar manner, it could be argued, Bowie’s album covers have more recently attempted to deconstruct his image, by obscuring it or removing it altogether and separate his famous name from his work, by making little mention of it. For example, *The Next Day* is a defamation of the iconic *Heroes* album cover. *Blackstar* is potentially Bowie’s ultimate form of scarcity, replacing his name and his image with ★.

A third way Bowie arguably projects this absence is his cessation of public concerts, interviews with media and few appearances in public at all since 2004. Buckley⁹⁶ notes upon the release of *The Next Day*: “still no interviews and certainly no

⁹³ Stuart Hall, *ibid.*, 283.

⁹⁴ Dick, Hebdige, Mark Mazullo, “The Man Whom the World Sold: Kurt Cobain, Rock’s Progressive Aesthetic, and the Challenges of Authenticity.” *The Musical Quarterly* 84 (4). Oxford University Press (2000): 715, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/742606> accessed December 30, 2015.

⁹⁵ Buckley, *Bowie: Music and Changes*, 132.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

promotional gigs. Some suspected this was some grand Warholian device, in an age where there is so much comment across so many platforms...The “mythogenic” Bowie was back: we would know him only through his music and his art, not by any direct form of communication.”

So how can Bowie’s “mythogeny” relate to his authenticity? Perhaps we can note a sense from Bowie that, in the knowledge that he is not original or “authentic” in exactly the senses Moore proposes, he attempts to maintain his authenticity behaviourally. What if scarcity becomes an aesthetic in itself, another strand to his form, something that catches people’s attention in the act of its disappearance, and even more so in the event of its re-emergence? The merits of scarcity may be seen in the success of *The Next Day*, Bowie’s first album in a decade of absence. Perhaps one can extend the idea of Bowie’s self-cultivated scarcity as authenticity further through Trilling,⁹⁷ who notes how celebrities constantly finding themselves in the public eye face a depletion of their identity. Arguably, Bowie’s absence is a deliberate move to avoid developing what Riesman calls the “other-directed personality,”⁹⁸ whereby an individual allows the opinions of others and their culture to shape them. Thus, Bowie may deliberately remove himself from the limelight to maintain an organic quality in his work, unpolluted by the outside world and not driven by a need to please an audience, but only by himself.

Some argue that Bowie disappears from the public eye for the first time living in Berlin, and argue he becomes his authentic self, the “everyman,”⁹⁹ the “existential tourist,” on a pilgrimage.¹⁰⁰ To take this further, we can introduce the idea that this conduct maintains his “aura,” preventing him from being “lost in the world as a commodity.” Therefore, by remaining absent, Bowie prevents fans from taking him or his music for granted, and earns respect from them. Potter¹⁰¹ foresees the “cultivation of a deliberate scarcity” as “allowing for the return of the aura, of the unique and

⁹⁷ Lionel Trilling, Mazullo, ‘The Man Whom the World Sold’, 738.

⁹⁸ Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), 66.

⁹⁹ Cinque, Moore and Redmond eds., *Enchanting David Bowie*, 59.

¹⁰⁰ Erich Cohen, 1988, *ibid.*, 80.

¹⁰¹ Potter, *The Authenticity Hoax*, 101.

irreproducible artistic work,” demanding an audience’s respect. This authentic artwork has a unique history, a journey across space-time that a fake could not replicate. Since uniqueness does not suffice, the artwork must also be part of a “fabric of tradition,” created at a specific time for a specific purpose. So what was the “irreproducible artistic work” that Bowie produced? Some believe that in *Low*, Bowie crafted an original sound that would later be defined as experimental/art rock. Debatably, if anyone were to attempt to copy this unique sound, consisting of original mixing, lyrical content and compositional methods - for example, Eno’s “oblique strategies,” randomly drawn cards, one such card reading “Honor thy mistake as a hidden intention”¹⁰² - they would not uphold as authentic. This would be for one reason: Between *Low* and the copy, only *Low* is deeply connected to the Berlin of 1977, created when the Berlin Wall existed. Therefore, there seems to be evidence of the strength of Potter’s theory, and of Bowie’s authenticity, through scarcity.

Bowie seemed to relax his enigma towards the last few months of his life. *I can’t give everything away* could be seen as Bowie, the double-edged artist, finally revealing himself. He appeared in public at the opening night of *Lazarus*. However, perhaps at least in one sense, he was loyal to his absence to the end: Both his new ★ identity, and not revealing that he was dying or that his work may concern his death, arguably maintained his polysemy, and he remained true to his form, so that upon his death, he made the ultimate impact. Upon Bowie’s passing, Visconti wrote: “His death was no different from his life - a work of Art.”¹⁰³ All of this is part of what I would call David Bowie’s authenticity.

Dissolution of the self, culture and authenticity: The logic of authentic inauthenticity

An irony in Bowie’s identity may be seen in how he portrays his personae, including the sound that goes with them, live in concert. On his 1983 *Serious Moonlight* tour he plays the “New man” persona, a man with bleached-blond hair, an effeminate

¹⁰² Tobias Ruther, *Heroes: David Bowie and Berlin* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2014), 52.

¹⁰³ Tony Visconti, Tony Visconti Facebook page, 10 January 2016, accessed 10 January 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/tony.visconti1?fref=ts>.

masculinity, with a crooning voice and, debatably, a typically eighties-sounding backing band. These features and personae are from *Let's Dance*, the current album being promoted. However, using the same persona and sound, Bowie also performs music from his back catalogue, where he projected different personae with their own voices, aesthetics and personality. For example, when he performs *Heroes*¹⁰⁴ it opens with a new introduction, featuring a synthesiser accompaniment, as he sings nonsense, followed by the words "I will be king, you will be queen." The lead guitar, made particularly evident in the chorus, is far more majestic and bold, perhaps with the tone knob turned up higher than in the 1977 recording. Furthermore, Bowie seems to make a joke of the whole song, dancing and swivelling the microphone as he croons "we can be heroes, just for one day," completely at odds with the still determination of his performance in the original music video.¹⁰⁵

Thus, Bowie seems to be not merely a "fake," but a "fake, fake," although what Barker and Taylor¹⁰⁶ are referring to is something real beneath a displayed falseness. So is there something we have missed in examining authenticity that perhaps Bowie himself draws attention to?

Perhaps Bowie may be exemplary of the ever-changing, indecipherable nature of the self. Bowie makes himself, and the entire concept of who he is, seem impossible to uniformly identify. He utilizes an "ironic play of identity,"¹⁰⁷ acting as a blank canvas that Garcia¹⁰⁸ calls a "surface," which is "not lead[ing] to the "real" human being beneath the surface... but just to more surfaces." Supporting this, Stevenson¹⁰⁹ claims that "the meaning of "David Bowie"...is not dependent upon a particular song or interview, but is largely constructed through his image." An example of Bowie distorting the self can be seen in how over the course of *The Man Who Sold the World*, ("I" becomes "we").¹¹⁰ In ditching all notions of authenticity, he explores the idea

¹⁰⁴ mastert316, "David Bowie – Heroes," Youtube video, 4:55, November 2006, accessed December 31, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=25asv1xzYEo>.

¹⁰⁵ emimusic, "David Bowie - Heroes," Youtube video, 3:26, February 2009, accessed Dec 31, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tgcc5V9Hu3g>.

¹⁰⁶ Barker and Taylor, *Faking it*, 328.

¹⁰⁷ Stevenson, *Bowie: Fame*, 51.

¹⁰⁸ Garcia, *ibid.*, 42.

¹⁰⁹ Stevenson, *Bowie: Fame*, 54.

¹¹⁰ Stark, Devereux, Dillane and Power eds. *Bowie: Critical Perspectives*, 95.

of playing with human identity. In doing so, he appears to demonstrate that there is no such thing as a single, fixed version of the self.

Moreover, Stevenson¹¹¹ notes how “Bowie’s performative art continually calls attention not only to the unfinished nature of the self, but also to the shifting and sometimes paradoxical sources of the self,” and how his music aims to demonstrate the extent to which culture and the self are inventions. So, it seems that Bowie may be proof that the self and culture are subjective concepts. Since the three forms of authenticity Moore proposes are based on the self and culture, it becomes easier to see how they may be inherently problematic and, furthermore, how they may not be a good fit for Bowie.

The reason that Bowie only seemed to fit Moore’s definitions in some respects may also be explained by the seemingly ambiguous identity he employs. It comes from the world of pop art, “a fusion of artifice and authenticity,”¹¹² where commercialization is brought on par with high art and art is seen not as an authentic expression of the self, but as an ironic play of identity. As a vessel for this fusion, Bowie draws attention to the duality between the pop artist celebrating a “banal consumerist culture of consumption” and offering “critical reflection on the ethical questions we all have to face.”¹¹³ Frith¹¹⁴ puts this in his own words. Dubbing Bowie the “Prince of English Bohemia,” he notes how he works within mass culture, at the same time becoming an artist and an outsider, fusing mainstream entertainment and artistic ideas without losing credibility.

If Bowie combines elements of authentic expression and artifice, how is it that authenticity can be ascribed to him? It seems that in doing this, Bowie creates his own kind of authenticity. Auslander, in his discussion of Bowie, brings forward the “logic of authentic inauthenticity” whereby, as Grossberg states, “the only possible claim to authenticity comes from a knowledge and admission that one is inauthentic.” Auslander argues that Bowie deconstructs rock authenticity through his “mutating

¹¹¹ Stevenson, *Bowie: Fame*, 54.

¹¹² Bracewell, *Re-make, Re-model*, 7, 50-1.

¹¹³ Stevenson, Devereux, Dillane and Power eds., *Bowie: Critical Perspectives*, 293

¹¹⁴ Simon Frith, Stevenson, *Bowie: Fame*, 112-113.

identities,” anticipating Frith’s identification that “music has meaning only as long as it keeps circulating. Authentic sounds are recognized by their place in a system of signs, and rock history only matters as a resource for recurrent pastiche.” Moreover, Grossberg notes how Bowie’s distinctiveness lies in the “frequency and extremity of his transformations” alongside an “assertion of the...artificiality of all his performance personae.”¹¹⁵

On the whole, despite appearances, Bowie’s identity may be very much grounded in authenticity. Perhaps it is because he exposes the subjectivity of culture and the self, that authenticity is based on these concepts and therefore, that it is also subjective. For that reason, it may be that authenticity is not authentic. However, what may be authentic is an identity that sets up the idea of culture and the self as flawed concepts, and confirms it. Consequently, perhaps inauthenticity is authentic, and Bowie, being inauthentic, is authentic. Moreover, his consistent inauthenticity, involving a constant re-adaptation of the self, based on former versions of the self, may further prove his authenticity. So it seems that the self, culture and Bowie’s personae have something in common: a becoming rather than a being, an ever-changeability, and that Bowie himself is the signifier of the authenticity of constant reinvention.

¹¹⁵ Phillip Auslander and Lawrence Grossberg, So-Rim Lee, “Bowie’s Authentic Inauthenticity.”

Conclusion

Over the course of this dissertation, I have attempted to define authenticity and apply definitions that are relevant to rock and pop music discourse to David Bowie. Through this process, I have ascribed some senses of first, second and third person authenticities to Bowie, but I have had difficulty in proving them as a whole, without finding Bowie could contradict them in one way or another. I have also come to unravel how these definitions are limited because they are based on concepts that themselves are subjective: the self and culture. Lastly, I have attempted to apply alternative definitions of authenticity to Bowie that have proven more successful: collective authenticity, form, cultivation of a deliberate scarcity, and the logic of inauthentic authenticity. These definitions play on the very idea of authenticity itself, as does Bowie.

“What the music says may be serious, [...] but as a medium it should not be questioned, analysed or taken too seriously. I think it should be...made into...a parody of itself...The music is the mask the message wears —...and I, the performer, am the message.”¹¹⁶ In this quote, Bowie appears suggest that he is a medium for promoting artistic reinvention. Bowie aside, popular music has always encouraged artists to create personae, in their lyrics and in the marketing of their image.¹¹⁷ So can constant reinvention perhaps, in the light of Bowie, who draws attention to it, and to the flawed nature of Moore’s definitions of authenticity, be called “authentic?” Is it not in fact artistic versatility and creativity that marks a truer authenticity than the artist who, “first person” authentic to Moore, only projects one version of themselves, one musical style? Does the latter not, in fact, seem more artificial after all? These writers seem to agree:

Wilde: “Man is least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask and he will tell you the truth.”

Emerson: “There is no deeper dissembler than the sincerest man.”

¹¹⁶ Devereux, Dillane and Power eds. *Bowie: Critical Perspectives*, 35-36.

¹¹⁷ Bethany Usher and Stephanie Fremaux, Devereux, Dillane and Power eds. *Bowie: Critical Perspectives*, 58.

Nietzsche: “Every profound spirit needs a mask.”¹¹⁸

All in all, being it the case that to be authentic is inauthentic, and to be inauthentic is authentic, perhaps David Bowie and all multifaceted artists are “inauthentically” authentic.

¹¹⁸ Trilling, *Sincerity*, 119.

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